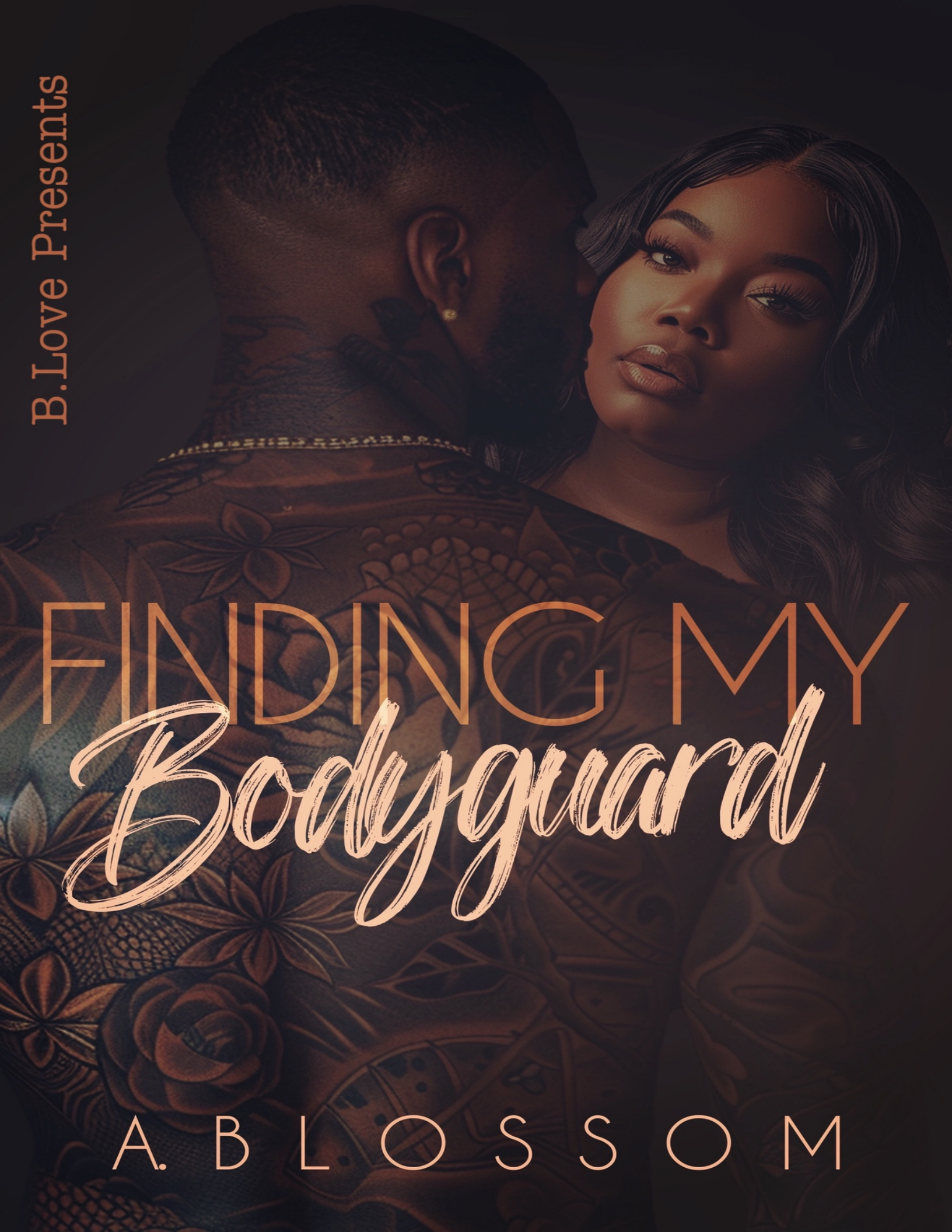
B.Love Presents
FINDING MY
Bodyguard
A. BLOSSOM

Finding My Bodyguard

A. Blossom

B. Love Publications

OceanofPDF.com

Copyright © 2024 by A. Blossom

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

OceanofPDF.com

This book is dedicated to my parents,
Sophia and Burton.
Because of you, I am.
Continue to rest in peace.

And to every woman that's ever felt unpretty, or like they didn't have a voice… May you one day fall in love with someone who never gets tired of saving you from yourself and others. May you find your bodyguard.

OceanofPDF.com

Contents

Synopsis
Preface

Prologue
1. Eight months later
2. Dr. Royale “Ro” London
3. Monroe
4. Dr. London
5. Monroe
6. Dr. London
7. Monroe
8. London
9. London
10. Monroe
11. London
12. Monroe
13. London
14. Monroe
15. London
16. Monroe
17. London
18. Monroe
19. Monroe
20. London
Monroe

Afterword
BLP

OceanofPDF.com

Synopsis

Claim my heart and protect me like a bodyguard.

Protection. Monroe Iris has lived her entire life seeking it. She longs to have a safe space to fall in love—to be vulnerable. She’s surrounded by things and people that were put in place to fill her with security but has none. Her entire life has been molded around being the perfect wife for an imperfect man. She’s stuck following a family tradition that doesn’t mean her well, without anyone in her corner to save her.

Tradition. Dr. Royale London doesn’t do things for the sake of tradition. After choosing to walk away from his birthright as Capo of his family's cartel, he dedicated his life to opening new doors and creating his own legacy. When Monroe shows up in his office seeking his services, he knows instantly that she needs more than what she initially came for.

For the first time in her life, Monroe is provided the protection she’s always wanted, but her duty to her family refuses to let her go. Will Dr. London be able to protect Monroe and help her carve out a new family legacy of her own, or will Monroe find that finding a bodyguard isn’t enough to save her?

OceanofPDF.com

Preface

Bodyguard: n. a person who is looking out for someone, protecting them, and ensuring their safety.

I can be your bodyguard!

OceanofPDF.com

Prologue

Monroe Iris

"Where's the ring?" I spoke loud enough to be heard over the chatter of my father and his business associates. This was not at all how I expected this to go. I knew my fate was to be married off to strengthen my father's mafia but I thought it would at least be romantic. I thought my future husband would at least present me with a ring and maybe a few gifts. This was anything but.

Kashus, my now fiancé, wasn't even here. His dad, Marco, had asked for my hand in marriage for his son and continued talking to my father as if I wasn't in the room. As if I wasn't the one being affected by this arrangement. It was causing my skin to boil.

"She wants a ring." Marco laughed in his thick Italian accent, causing everyone in the room to join him. My head cocked to the side. I didn't see what was funny. Proposals were supposed to come with rings. My question was a valid one.

"Kash will take care of that soon. You worry about looking pretty and minding your manners." My father, Jacob, patted my leg under the table. "You don't interrupt men while they are speaking." He whispered the last part, causing my eyes to roll. It was always the same thing with him. Be seen and not heard. Don't upset the men.

My father carried on as if we lived in the eighteen hundreds. Hell, my whole family did. This was the lifestyle I had been born into. There was no room for women to think or speak in the mafia. We had a specific purpose

—to be wives, take care of the home, and produce heirs. I was ready to leave my father's suffocating house, even if it meant moving in with a stranger. I had been researching Kashus and his family since I discovered he would be my husband. They were a part of a crime family from Valdosta, Georgia.

Kashus was Marco’s only son, and he was mixed. Marco had broken tradition and reproduced with a black woman. The decision had weakened their status in the business, and now they were trying to gain respect in my father's all-black mafia. Marco had been married to Kashus's mom for a few years before she died. A marriage bonded by love was something I’d never witnessed. My mother and father were arranged and had eventually learned to love each other. That was different.

On social media, there were pictures of Marco Grant and his wife, Tammie Grant. They looked happy, and I hoped their love meant they’d raised their son to value and respect women a little more than my father did.

“Sorry, I’m late.” A deep baritone caused me to turn on my heels. My eyes bulged as who I assumed to be Kashus Grant entered the room.

“Damn,” I whispered loud enough for only me to hear. The pictures I’d seen of him did him no justice. My eyes traveled the length of his body. He was gorgeous—probably the most attractive man I’d ever laid eyes on. He was tall and stocky. His yellow highlighter colored skin coated his chiseled body like a work of art. His dreads were freshly retwisted and pulled into a man bun. There was no way he didn’t get attention everywhere he went. He was so pretty but in a street sort of way. The man looked like he had the type of dick that made women lose their minds.

“You’re always late, Kash.” His father scoffed.

“I’m always handling business.” He walked further into the room. I stared at him. The man even walked sexy. If this was going to be my husband, I was a lucky girl.

“Where’s the woman you bought me?” His eyes traveled to me.

My breath hitched at his statement. Bought was such an ugly word to describe this arrangement, but I guessed it was technically what they’d done.

“Kashus, don’t start your bullshit.” Marco grunted.

Kashus waved his hand to dismiss him. My eyes darted between the father and son pair. They looked nothing alike. There was no doubt that Kashus had to favor his mother.

“You put me in this bullshit, Marco.” Kashus spat back. He was bold, and I was smitten. He moved to me. I was the only woman in the room, besides the server, so it had to be obvious who I was. Besides, I was sure he’d seen pictures of me.

“Are you my soon-to-be wife?” His tongue swiped over his lips, and my insides heated. I nodded. I was too turned on to speak.

“I’m Kashus, but everybody calls me Kash.” He approached me, extending his hand. I glanced up at him. His body towered over me from where I sat at the table, but he wasn’t much taller than me. At five-ten, I probably came to his chest.

“Monroe Iris.” I extended my hand. He didn’t waste any time kissing it. His gaze was on me intensely, but I couldn’t read him. I couldn’t tell what he was thinking.

“Nice to meet you, Monroe.”

He let go of my hand and walked to his seat, which was located directly across from mine. His eyes found me once more. His tongue grazed over his thick, juicy lips before he looked away. That was it? That was all he was going to say to me?

“That’s it? Where’s my ring?” I voiced my concern, causing everyone to turn to me. Without hesitation, Kash reached into his pocket, pulled out a piece of paper, and slapped it on the table.

“My bad, ma.” His voice was nonchalant as he slid the paper over to me. “Here go a blank check. Knock yo’self out.”

He had to be kidding me. My eyes shot to my father. I waited for him to correct the disrespect, but he didn’t. Glaring across the table at Kashus, I tried my best to gain my composure and remain ladylike, but this light bright negro had me fucked up. I slapped my hand down and attempted to slide the check back across the table but was stopped by my father.

“How about you go grab a few of your things, Monroe? Us men need to discuss business.” My father picked the check up off the table and placed it in his wallet before he dismissed me.

Rolling my eyes, I stood from the table. I wanted to say something. The more I thought about it, the more I didn’t want to risk turning off my new family. I didn’t know if I would get another proposal offer. My dark skin and the few extra pounds I carried had made it hard for my father to find an appropriate husband for me. Kashus Grant was possibly my last chance.

“I will have this check deposited into your account, and you can get whatever ring you wish.”

I stared at my father. He didn’t get it, and nobody in the room understood the significance of the wedding ring. Glancing around the room, I took in my audience of rich, powerful men. It was no use in fighting. I knew it would only end in me draining my energy. I needed to save that for my arrogant new fiancé.

“Wait up, Monroe.” Kashus met me at the threshold of the door.

“I ain’t trying to start on the wrong foot. We’ll get you a ring, shawty. I ain’t know I was supposed to have one today.” He shrugged. I wasn’t trying to hear his lame ass excuse, so I headed up the stairs. Briskly, he grabbed my arm, stopping me in my tracks. “Don’t worry about grabbing a lot. I’ll have someone bring yo’ shit to my crib in the morning.”

He leaned close to my ear. His smell was intoxicating, and I was pissed his presence was rendering me speechless. He was an asshole, but I couldn’t help but be attracted to him. I nodded quickly then turned to head up the stairs to my room. My bag was already packed and had been for weeks. I knew what was coming.

Since I was old enough, I’d known I would be married away to the highest bidder or whoever my father needed to strengthen his business. It was the rightful passage of all the Iris women—what we were born to do. As I entered my bedroom, I glanced around. This would be my last time here. It was bittersweet, but I was ready for the change. This room sometimes felt like a prison. It was where I was often sent for stepping out of line and defending myself against my father’s outdated opinions about my place as a woman.

I stopped to check myself in the mirror and stared at my chocolate reflection. I looked beautiful in my floor length floral maxi dress. It hugged all my curves just right. I always believed I was beautiful, but I knew I needed to shed some pounds. I was a big girl.

“This is it,” I whispered to myself.

“You ready?” My father's wife, Contessa, entered my room. She’d been the first woman my father had married since my mother passed away giving birth to my brother when I was ten. It had been a tragic ordeal because my mom and brother both didn’t make it. For years, it had just been my father and me until five years ago when he brought Contessa home and introduced her as his wife.

Contessa was only four years older than me. She was thirty-two, and I was twenty-eight. It was natural that she became more of a friend than a stepmother. She understood this lifestyle. She understood what it was like to be in an arranged marriage because her marriage to my father had also been a business deal. We bonded over that, and because I had no siblings or cousins I was close to, she'd been the closest thing I had to a friend. Turning to her, I smiled.

"As ready as I can be, Tessa. I'm nervous, and my new husband is an asshole."

"An asshole that you're attracted to." She giggled as she pointed to my hardened nipples.

"Stop!" I looked down quickly, rubbing my arms across my chest to get them to go down.

Tessa laughed. "The nerves are natural. Try to relax. He's probably just as nervous as you. You're his first wife. So that's good." Tessa moved closer to me, and we both plopped down on the bed. Tessa had six sisters who were in arranged marriages, so she'd been privy to how this thing worked. By the time her father had sent her to mine, she'd seen all her sisters go.

"What's expected of me tonight? Do I have to sleep with him?"

I was curious. I wasn't a virgin, but I wasn't extremely sexually active either. I had been with two men intimately. One was my high school boyfriend, Ricky. We were young and just wanted to explore sex. The other was a guy who used to work for my father, Jansen. Jansen was young and charming, and we loved each other. He treated me nicely, but he wanted us to remain a secret. I was young and foolish and believed that we had a chance.

I thought if I talked to my father, it could be arranged for us to marry. I was wrong, and the moment I confided in my dad, Jansen disappeared without a trace soon after, just like Ricky. I assumed they'd both suffered the same fate for getting involved with me… death. This was why I'd sworn off sex and dating altogether. I couldn't stand the thought of anyone else losing their life because of me. I was already spoken for… promised to someone else. It was no use mingling around anyway. I'd decided to take care of my needs myself.

"Sex is going to happen, Monroe; he's your fiancé," Tessa blurted.

“I know, but is it expected tonight?” I wanted to know, not because I was thinking about fucking his arrogant ass, but because I wanted to be prepared.

“Every husband is different, and so is every arrangement. You're lucky because you don’t have to give him a baby since he already has two kids.”

I sighed. I wasn’t too excited about Kash already having two kids, but I had no choice. Plus, it did mean the pressure to produce an heir was off. Still, I wanted to have children of my own one day. I hoped that would still be an option. I wanted a marriage full of love and happiness, even if it was arranged.

Contessa and I lay there for a minute, staring at the ceiling. I was going to miss her. We spent a lot of time together, confiding in one another. I was only going a few hundred miles away, but it felt like millions.

“I’m going to miss you.” I turned to face Tessa.

“I’m going to miss you too. You won’t be in prison, though. We can link up whenever.”

“Still, you won’t be right up the hall. My dad could have found me a closer husband.” I pouted. Valdosta was nearly an entire day’s drive from where we lived in Bristol City.

“Hey, what’s a few miles when we have a private jet and can FaceTime all day?” Contessa sniffled as tears rolled down her cheeks. I joined her, wrapping my arms around her where we lay on the bed. I think Tessa was sadder than I was. She would be in this house alone with my dad for the first time since she and my father had gotten married four years ago.

“Monroe!” That was my father. Slowly getting up from the bed, I grabbed my suitcase and moved to the door. Contessa grabbed my hand and pulled me into one last hug.

“Don’t forget who you are. Don’t lose yourself,” she whispered into my ear. I nodded. *Don’t lose myself.* I repeated her words as I rolled my suitcase down the hall to the staircase.

Our butler greeted me. “I’ll take that, Miss Monroe.”

I descended the stairs one at a time, staring at my fiancé. Everything I’d prepared for all my life was about to begin today. As I reached the bottom of the stairs, Kashus approached me.

“Let’s go home.” He took my hand and led me to the front door. My knees buckled at his touch. I glanced at my father’s house and waved

goodbye to Tessa. I looked over at my father. There was emotion on his face for the first time. He almost looked sad.

“Monroe.” He called me over. My body moved to him, dropping Kashus’s hand. His arms wrapped around me in a warm embrace. I hadn’t gotten one of these hugs from him since I was a little girl.

“Obey your future husband. This union will strengthen our family—our business.” He whispered into my ear, killing the warmness of the moment. This was my father. He didn’t show emotion, and he followed the code of the mafia no matter what. Everything was always about the family business, tradition, and honor.

“Yes, I know, Daddy,” I responded. Our embrace ended, and I was back hand in hand with Kashus.

“I’m daddy now, beautiful,” he whispered in my ear. My eyes shot to my fiancé. The cockiness of this man was unbelievable. I knew deep in my heart that he wouldn’t be the husband I longed for. Still, I was hopeful for our marriage. I had to be. This was everything that I’d been taught to aspire for. As we climbed into the car, I stared at my family home. My stomach was in knots. My father’s voice was on repeat in my head.

Obey your future husband.

That was my task.

OceanofPDF.com

Eight months later

Monroe

“Wow.”

My mouth dropped open as I watched both of my fiancé’s baby mamas waltz through the club doors we’d gathered at for Kashus’s birthday. I couldn’t believe he’d invited them to his birthday party knowing I would be in attendance. The disrespect Kashus continued to show me made me fume in my seat. This engagement wasn’t at all how I expected it to be. Kashus Grant had turned out to be the asshole I’d pegged him to be on day one.

He’d wooed and lured me in with his charm and big dick, only to let me know he had no interest in a monogamous relationship. Our situation was strictly business. There was no love between us. Hell, there wasn’t even any respect. I was to be the trophy wife he occasionally fucked and paraded around at business meetings. My last name held more weight in the mafia than his. Our arrangement was nothing more than a move on his chessboard to running his family business. I knew that in the beginning, but I had hoped that this thing would be different. I needed it to be different.

Rolling my eyes, I smoothed down my bust down middle part wig. Drea and Whitney were not about to catch me slipping.

“You invited them?”

My eyes traveled from the entrance to Kashus, who was sitting next to me on the couch. His eyes told me he heard me, but the way he inhaled and

exhaled his blunt without responding said he didn't. My extra-long nails tapped anxiously on my exposed thigh as Drea and Whitney strutted their half-naked asses into our VIP area.

Drea and Whitney were beautiful. They were both Dominican with small petite frames and perfect bodies. I watched as they switched up the stairs and through the crowd of people who had gathered to celebrate Kash. The closer they got, the more I shook my head. These broads were the only grown-ass women I knew who wore matching outfits. I guess if you were okay with sharing dick, then what was a few pairs of clothes. I gazed over them, trying not to share my disdain, but I knew it was written all over my face. Many of the guests were close enough to Kash to know his baby mamas and I didn't get along. They hated me for being his fiancée, and I didn't care for them because they were still sleeping with him. It was a stupid and childish feud that I wanted so badly to break free from, but I couldn't.

"Happy birthday, baby daddy!" They sang in unison as they mounted both sides of his lap. I knew they didn't give a fuck that I was beside him. They would take any opportunity they had to make me look like a fool. My eyes zeroed in on Kashus. I watched him wrap his arms around them briefly before his eyes met mine. Arranged marriage or not, he knew he'd better respect me in public. Quickly, he sat up, pushing them off his lap.

"Chill, respect my fiancée in public," he mumbled as he stood from the couch.

"You weren't saying that last night, papi." Drea rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, last night it was fuck her, now it's respect her. You're confusing me." Whitney waved her arms at me.

I wasn't about to let them see me sweat. They weren't worth me looking bothered in front of all these people. Slyly, I met them with a smirk as I lifted my drink to my mouth. Call it petty, but I made sure they got a good glimpse of my five-hundred-thousand-dollar ring. I could see Drea's blood boiling as I sipped my drink and watched Kashus move toward them.

"I told you about disrespecting my fiancée. This ain't the place." His voice was just loud enough for people closest to him to hear. Whitney scoffed as she pushed past Kash to sit down next to me.

"Nah, not here." Kashus stopped her. "I'ma show them to their section. I'll be right back." He leaned down and placed a kiss on my cheek.

Sometimes, I couldn’t tell if things like that were for show or if he meant them.

“Okay.”

I nodded my head. At least he had enough sense to get them their own section. We were all sharing dick, but I didn’t want people to think we were a quadruple or something. My eyes stayed on Kashus as he escorted them out of the section and across the club. His hand was on the small of their backs. The physical touch bothered me, but making a scene about it was useless. Nothing was changing about Kashus’s relationship with me. I couldn’t leave, and he knew it. Leaving this arrangement would mean exile from my family, no mafia funds, no protection, and maybe even death. Most importantly, it would mean that I failed.

I couldn’t fail at the only task I’d been given. I was better off staying put. This was the life I’d been born into. The life I’d been very strategically raised for. I knew what to expect. All husbands had side pieces, even my father. I was lucky that Kash did his dirt outside of the house. Tessa had told me horror stories of husbands who had moved their mistresses into the home. My father had several mistresses. This was how things worked. My phone vibrating against my thigh caused me to look down.

Kash: About to handle some business. Be back in a minute.

As I read his message, my eyebrows knitted together. *What business did he have to attend to on his birthday?* Glancing around the club, I searched for him in the crowd, but he was nowhere to be found… Neither were Drea and Whitney. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t upset. I was fuming. I wasn’t stupid. My fiancé had just ditched me for his baby mamas.

Taking a deep breath, I took another sip of my drink and checked the time on my phone. It was ten o’clock on the dot. Kashus had thirty minutes to return before I had our driver pull around and take me home. There was no point in me staying if he wouldn’t be here. I had a flight to catch to Miami in the morning. In two days, I was getting my body done at the request of my fiancé.

Sighing, I picked up my drink and finished it off before grabbing the bottle on the table and taking it to the head. I didn’t drink often, but something about tonight said I needed to release.

“Easy there, beautiful.” A deep baritone gained my attention. My eyes traveled to the right of me as I swallowed a big gulp of liquor. It was dark, and his midnight skin complexion blended into the ambiance. I wasn't sure

if I had seen him before. Everyone here knew Kashus in some form or fashion, so it was possible. I narrowed my gaze, trying to make out which one of Kashus's friends had the guts to speak to me, let alone call me beautiful. Kashus could have as many women as he wanted, but if a man looked at me, he would act like an ass.

I stared at the stranger hard, but it was no use. His dark shades and perfectly trimmed beard shielded his identity. I could see that he was gorgeous just by how his designer shirt hugged his broad shoulders. Even with shades, I could feel his eyes on me. When he let his tongue swipe over his juicy lips, I choked, causing a few dribbles of liquor to cascade down my chin.

"Oh my." I fumbled with the bottle, brought it down to the table, and searched for a napkin to clean myself up.

"Slow down, ma. Let me help you." The stranger moved to me with a napkin in hand. He patted my chin dry. His gaze on me never wavered. Now that he was closer, the familiarity of his face puzzled me. He looked so familiar, but I couldn't pinpoint exactly who he was. It was bothering me. `

"A beautiful woman like yourself shouldn't be drinking out the bottle." He spoke low but loud enough for me to hear him over the music.

I scoffed. *Good thing I didn't ask you then*, I thought. I didn't need another man telling me what was unladylike for me to do. I'd heard it all before.

"Good thing I didn't a—"

"Here, let me pour it for you. Like I said, you shouldn't be drinking out the bottle alone." Before I could process what was going on, he was standing over me with the bottle of tequila.

"Lean your head back." My eyes traveled the length of him. He was taller than Kashus, and his presence was massive. My body was reacting to him, and I felt guilty about it. This interaction had already gone too far. It was dangerous for both of us.

As I stared at the familiar stranger, I didn't care about any risks. I tipped my head back, throwing caution to the wind, allowing my hair to swing down my back. My mouth opened, and I glared at the fine man before me.

"Wider, beautiful. Stick out that tongue."

Something about his words sent tingles through my body. Tingles that had me spreading my mouth wide and sticking out my tongue.

“There you go. Take that shit!” He coached me as he continued to pour the liquor down my throat. His voice was low, and my senses were heightened. Everything about this moment was turning me on. My nipples were peeking through the little black dress I had on as the liquor sailed down my throat.

“Nah, Ro, not her!”

An unknown male’s voice pierced my ears, causing me to tilt my head up.

“That is Kash’s fiancée, nigga.” My eyes bounced between the two beautiful strangers and then to everyone in our section. All eyes were on me, and I knew then that I had fucked up. Fear overtook me as I looked around the club, frantically searching for Kash. He was still missing in action, but I knew this incident was bound to get back to him. I was sure the strange man was about to book it out of there, but I was completely caught off guard when he closed the space between us.

“Stay, beautiful, and no more liquor for you tonight,” he whispered in my ear. Briskly, he tucked the bottle under his arm and headed out of the section with his friend. He’d spoken to me even after he knew who I was. His boldness was sexy. I watched him until he disappeared out of the club, hoping that he would be safe. I didn’t know him, but he’d helped to take my mind off Kashus and his baby mamas, if only momentarily. Gazing at my phone, I took one more glance at the time. Kashus’s time was up. Standing from the couch, I moved to my personal security detail.

“I’m ready to go, Rah.” I informed him. Rah had been my security detail since I’d moved to Bristol City. He was related to Kashus on his mother’s side. Rah used to be Kashus’s right-hand man, but they’d demoted him to my security because he was gay. He didn’t really say much to me but he wasn’t an asshole either. His loyalty was to his family, and I understood that.

“I’ll have the car come around.” He nodded as he extended his arm for me to latch onto. As we headed out of the club, I finally spotted Kash. I froze momentarily as what I was witnessing registered in my head. My fiancé was leaving the bathroom with Drea and Whitney. All three of them had freshly fucked looks across their faces. To know something was happening was one thing, but to witness it was another. My heart pounded in my chest, and my feet couldn’t move.

“Are you ready, Monroe?” Rah asked breaking my gaze on Kashus. He attempted to move us toward the exit, but I wouldn’t move. I wanted him to see me. This man had just ditched me to fuck his baby mamas in a club bathroom. As if on cue, Kashus’s eyes found mine. There was no look of regret on his face. I could start a scene, but it would only end in me looking stupid in public. Taking a deep breath, I turned to Rah.

“I’m ready. Let’s go.”

Rah nodded as he walked me out of the club. The fresh, cold air hit my face, alerting me of the tears falling from my eyes. Looking around, I saw the handsome stranger from the club as he climbed into the back of a black SUV. Immediately, thoughts of the stranger flooded my mind. I wanted to know who he was, but I didn’t have enough guts to stop and ask him. It was no use. I was arranged to be married to Kashus. It was my fate, and nothing would change about that.

OceanofPDF.com

Dr. Royale “Ro” London

“Nigga, you trying to get us killed over a bitch.” My best friend, Meechie, shook his head as we slid into the back of the black SUV.

I couldn’t do anything but laugh as thoughts of the thick, chocolate beauty flashed in my mind. I could pretend I didn’t know she was Kashus’s fiancée, but I knew. Meechie had given me the rundown on everyone when we arrived. I didn’t mind playing with fire by approaching her. She was beautiful. The most beautiful woman I’d seen in a long time, and she needed some company because her supposed fiancé was in the bathroom fucking two loose-looking chicken head hos, whose surgeries I’d probably done.

“That nigga ain’t the only nigga with a gun.” I waved him off. Meechie knew nobody could stop me from doing what I wanted. I didn’t get scared easily.

“Oh, so Mr. Straight and Narrow Doctor gon’ come up out the scrubs and shoot a nigga now? OK,” Meechie joked, making me burst into laughter.

“Doctor or not, you know I’m always carrying,” I replied.

It was the truth. Everyone around me liked to joke about my decision to leave the family business and become a doctor. Dedicating my entire life to the cartel, murdering, and destroying families wasn’t my thing. I wanted something different out of life, so I set out to get it. That didn’t mean I was

no pussy ass nigga. I was born to be a killer, heir to the London Cartel. I stayed with my Glock just in case a nigga thought he could try me.

“Don’t I know it, nigga? You better hope yo’ lil stunt didn’t ruin my business dealings with that nigga Kashus. I ain’t trying to hear yo’ pops mouth.”

“I don’t care either way.” The London Cartel was my father Matthew’s pride and joy. Even from behind bars, he still controlled the daily business dealings. Meechie was the head of the organization, but my father still called most of the shots. It was a job that was supposed to be mine, but I’d retired before it started. After my father was sent to federal prison and a rival crime family killed my little brother, I quit. I took college seriously and became a plastic surgeon. It was a choice my father still hated me for. To him, I was a disgrace to his legacy.

The only reason why I wasn’t completely exiled from the cartel was because of Meechie. He was my best friend. We’d grown up together. His father was my father’s right-hand man. Everything we’d been through in life, we’d been through it together. From learning to shoot our first gun to getting our first pieces of pussy. It was honorable that Meechie hadn’t turned his back on me because of my decision not to be a gangster. Besides, I’d been the one to vouch for him and turn my position as head of the cartel over to him. It was my first and last decision as head of the London cartel. Whenever he needed me, I was there, and vice versa.

Hence, why I was even here tonight. I didn’t go out much. My life was filled with work, but Meechie needed a wingman to this party to vet a new business associate for the cartel. I was the only person he trusted to have his back and feel the vibes. So, here I was, thousands of miles away from home, attending a birthday party for a nigga I had only heard of.

“Kashus will do the deal. He stupid, but he ain’t that stupid,” I commented as I took a swig from the liquor bottle I’d taken from the chocolate beauty. Just that fast, my mind was back on her. There was something about her sitting there all alone that had beckoned me in like a magnet. I wanted more time with her, but I knew it was best to leave well enough alone before a bunch of bullshit popped off.

“I hope so, nigga. You know niggas get sensitive about they bitches, and you practically had his sucking your dick in the club.”

Again, images of her opening her beautiful mouth and sticking out her tongue for me flooded my brain. There was no doubt in my mind that she

could suck a mean ass dick.

“You over there thinking about her now, ain’t you?” Meechie was staring at me with a big stupid grin on his face.

“She was thirsty, and I was just helping her fine ass out.” I shrugged.

“Yeah, okay. Just make sure you give me a two-week notice next time you decide to try and start a war behind some pussy.” Meechie laughed as our car pulled into the landing strip where our private plane awaited.

“Noted.” I took one final swig of the liquor before exiting the car and heading toward the plane. I had no intention of seeing the chocolate beauty again. Fine as she was, we lived in two different states, and she was someone else’s fiancée. I might go after her if she ever crossed my path again. A woman that beautiful deserved to be with a man who wouldn’t leave her alone to go fuck off. Taking in my surroundings, I walked swiftly to the plane. I had already planned to get a few hours of sleep. As I rounded the corner, the sight of naked asses shaking greeted me. I whipped my hand across my face and shook my head. I’d forgotten how we’d flown here.

“Let’s get this motherfucker cracking!” Meechie shouted as he pushed past me. Meechie was always with the shenanigans. On the way here, he insisted that we bring strippers aboard. It was the way he always traveled. Shaking my head, I watched as the strippers stormed him. Meechie wasted no time throwing dollars and grabbing a hand full of ass.

“This nigga,” I mumbled under my breath as a short, light-skinned woman bent over in front of me. She was beautiful, but her doctor had done a horrible job with her Brazilian butt lift. Pulling out my business card, I stuffed it in her pink G String.

“I can fix that for you,” I whispered, gently pushing past her. I could hear her scoff from behind me as Meechie burst into laughter.

“You wild for that, my boy. Briana got your ass pussy whipped.”

I shrugged at the mention of the exotic dancer I’d been seeing for a few months as I headed to the back of the airplane. This had nothing to do with Briana, though she made every dancer here look mediocre. We weren’t together, though. Briana and I had weekly dick appointments and a few occasional dates, but nothing major. I didn’t feel like entertaining because I was tired. Having my own plastic surgery business meant a lot of long nights and early mornings.

Years ago, I would have been right there with Meechie fucking off, enjoying being on top of the world, but working a regular nine-to-five had

humbled me. I wasn't that flashy nigga anymore. I was chill. It was a stark contrast, but it was the price I'd paid for making a legitimate living. Sinking in the recliner, I tuned Meechie and the strip show in front of me out. Nobody was going to get in the way of my sleep. I had a busy day with pre-operation appointments ahead of me tomorrow. I reclined the seat as far as it could go and forced my eyes shut. As soon as my eyes closed, I could see her. The chocolate beauty with the beautiful lips. I didn't know why she was on my mind so heavily, but I welcomed the visuals of her as sleep found me.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

"Wait! What do you mean you not coming?" I pushed Kashus's head up from between my thighs. His sticky lips and low eyes stared up at me. An innocent, cocky expression etched across his face. I should have known he was up to something when he came home bearing gifts and being nice. I thought he was attempting to apologize for his disrespect last night by ducking off with Drea and Whitney.

Now it was clear he was attempting to send me halfway across the country to have the breast implants, a tummy tuck, and lipo surgery he requested alone. Kashus tried to ignore me and put his head back in between my thighs, but I pushed his head away. Eating my pussy wasn't enough to distract me from this. Glaring at him, I pushed my legs together.

"You can't be serious, Kashus."

"Shit too hectic right now, Monroe. I can't leave these niggas in charge." He attempted to part my thighs, but I swung my right leg over his head and climbed out of the bed.

"Kashus, this is the surgery you wanted me to get. How are you not going to come? Make it make sense!" I yelled. My heart was beating out of my chest with anger. This was crazy.

"The surgery I want you to have?" Kashus scoffed. He climbed out of bed and headed toward the walk-in closet.

"Yes, the surgery you want me to have!" I followed him, pulling down the oversized T-shirt dress I had on. Plastic surgery was one hundred

percent his idea. He wouldn't do the arrangement without it. No one had consulted me about it. My fiancé and my father decided what I was going to do with my body. Nobody considered that I loved myself. Sometimes, others' views of my body made me rethink my acceptance of it. Kashus had been open about everything he disliked about my physical appearance.

"Are you not the one that requested it?" I was heated. This wasn't something he was going to sweep under the rug. When I'd booked my surgery date, he agreed to be there all three days for all my appointments. That was six months ago. He had ample time to clear his schedule. Husbands were supposed to be supportive, and he was going to be my husband in less than three months. Besides, this was a major operation, and he should want to be there to help with my recovery.

"Yeah, I requested it, but you should want this for yourself, Monroe. Not for me." He didn't even look at me as he pulled a button-down shirt off the hanger. He was getting ready to leave. I had a flight to Miami in two hours, and he was getting ready to leave. I stood there for a minute, watching him get dressed. A million thoughts ran through my mind. I wasn't doing this alone. He had me fucked up.

"I'm not getting the surgery if you not coming!" I blurted. Kashus knew I didn't have any friends to tag alone. He knew I was nervous about the surgery.

"Your call. You want to be fat and sloppy? Be my fucking guest, Monroe. You can do that shit without a husband." He pushed past me, throwing our arrangement in my face. His words penetrated me deeply. It wasn't new for Kashus to talk to me disrespectfully, but calling me fat and sloppy was new. He didn't like my body. I was aware. He made me keep a shirt on when we would have sex. He didn't like for me to walk around the house in a bra and panties. He said my belly looked disgusting. Somehow, hearing him describe me as fat and sloppy had shocked me… Even more than him threatening to end our engagement. My knees wobbled, and my hands shook with anger. This man had me fucked up.

"Fuck you, Kashus, and fuck this engagement!" I pulled my engagement ring off my finger and launched it across the room. The ring hit him right on the side of his head before hitting the floor. Kashus whipped his head in my direction. He glanced at me then at the ring as it twirled around the floor. In one swift movement, Kashus was up on me, invading my space. His hand was on my neck as he pushed me into the wall.

“Who the fuck are you talking to?” His hand tightened around my neck. “I’m your future husband, Monroe. Show me some fucking respect.”

“Show me some!” I shouted back. He glared at me. My heart was pounding with fear. Kashus had never hit me, but the look in his eyes made me think it was possible today. We eyed each other for a minute.

“The surgery is a nonnegotiable, Monroe. You know that. Your father knows that. I’m not about to be married to no big girl.” He removed his hand from my neck.

“I have to get the surgery, but I’m not doing it alone, Kashus. It’s three days. Clear your schedule!” I walked past him to the bed. Kashus wiped his hand across his face.

“Look, it’s too much to handle here. Rah will be there. He’ll make sure you are good. I can fly out Contessa to keep you company.” He sighed. My head shook as I slid on my designer slides. Contessa wasn’t in any shape to travel. She was seven months pregnant with my little brother or sister. Having Rah there would be okay, but I wanted my fiancé.

“Clear your schedule, Kashus.” I folded my arms across my chest and poked my hip out. I wasn’t backing down. “You want this surgery so bad, get on the plane.”

Kashus stood there silent for a minute before pulling out his phone. I turned to face the mirror. My eyes roamed my body. I was on the fence about this surgery. I loved myself. I’d always thought I was beautiful. At the same time, though, I knew I didn’t look like a model. I had a low belly pouch, back rolls, and cellulite. I kind of wanted a little nip tuck, but being told I had to hit differently. I stared at my fiancé. He was so handsome. I once felt lucky to be the one he would marry; now I just felt blah. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t holding out hope this surgery would make Kashus love and respect me a little more. I was beautiful now, but I would be stunning once the doctor took this stomach and back fat and added more titties. Kashus walked over to me. I could feel his heavy breathing on my neck before he placed a soft kiss there.

“You are beautiful, Monroe, and this surgery just gon’ magnify that beauty.” He turned me around to face him before placing a soft kiss on my forehead.

“When you look right on my arm, watch the type of money moves we’ll able to make.” Kashus slid the engagement ring back onto my finger.

“So that means you going?”

“Yeah, man.” He sighed. I jumped into his arms with excitement.

“Great!” I smiled. I kissed him on the lips. Kashus dropped his head in defeat. In the back of my mind, I knew this wasn’t normal. I knew this wasn’t what love and having a healthy relationship was. With my circumstances, though, this was all I was ever going to get. Real love didn’t exist for me.

“I’ll have Rah come get the bags. Go get in the car. I’ll be down in a minute.” Kashus placed one more peck on my forehead before I walked away. My reflection in the hallway mirrors seemed to be taunting me as I headed to the stairs. The realization that I wouldn’t look the same when I returned hit me. It was bittersweet. My hands ran down my body and landed on my lower belly fupa. I cupped the fat in my hand and mushed it. I’d had this lower belly pouch for years. Did I want to get rid of it?

“Hmph, I guess.” I let go of my belly pouch and walked down the stairs to the car that would carry us to the airport.

I SETTLED ON THE PRIVATE JET IN THE RECLINER CHAIR NEXT TO KASHUS. My nerves had nothing to do with the flight. I’d flown a thousand times before, but my impending date with the operating table was turning my stomach. I’d never gotten plastic surgery before. The only surgery I’d ever had was when I’d gotten my tonsils removed at eight years old. My father hadn’t been there for the procedure because he was away on business.

My mother was still alive and had been there by my side the entire time. It was one of my favorite memories of her. Looking over at an already sleeping Kashus, I pulled out my phone and went to the picture of my mom that I kept in my favorites. I often wondered if she had lived, would my life had been different? I never had to question her love. It wasn’t conditional. Would she have let my father agree to this surgery? Would she want me to get this surgery? All plastic surgeries came with a risk. Was it worth it?

I sighed as I stared at my mother. I was the spitting image of her. Her chocolate skin mirrored mine. She was so confident and joyous, considering her situation. I stared at the picture until tears formed in my eyes. I needed my mother. I needed someone whose love wasn’t conditional. My father’s

love was always centered around who I would add to his business. Kashus's love was contingent on what my family name could give him.

Closing the picture, I sat back in my seat and closed my eyes. Hopefully, sleep could find me and offer some relief from my wandering thoughts. When I awoke, Kashus was standing over me.

"Let's go." He shook my body. I hopped up and peered out of the window. We'd landed in Miami. Kashus led me off the jet and into the back of a black SUV. We didn't have much time before my appointment at Dr. London's office. Kashus didn't say anything to me as we drove down the highway. He pretended to be immersed in work. I enjoyed the silence as I let the beautiful views of Miami calm my nerves.

London's Plastic Surgery was only twenty minutes from the airport, but it felt like forty the way my thoughts were raging. My heart skipped a beat as the car stopped in front of the building. This was it. I opened the door just as Kashus rounded the car.

"Let's go get you that banging ass body." He held out his hand and walked me up the stairs and into the bustling office of Dr. London. I couldn't shake the nagging feeling of unease as I approached the receptionist's desk.

"Hello, my name is Monroe… um Iris. I have a pre-op appointment today with Dr. London."

"Oh, hello, Ms. Iris. I'm Rebecca, one of the nurses here. Give me a second to get you pulled up in the computer."

I nodded my head and gazed around to take in the office. It didn't look like a typical doctor's office. Everything was sleek and state of the art. My hand slid down the gold trim on the black counter. This place was nicer than the pictures online. My initial interest in this place was that the surgeons, along with much of the staff, were black. Kashus had recommended the surgeon who had done Drea and Whitney's bodies, but I declined.

"We have you right here, ma'am, and it looks like they're ready for you."

My head swiveled, and my chest rose and fell rapidly. I didn't expect it to be that fast.

"Um, can my fiancé go back too?" I looked between the receptionist and Kashus.

"Sure—"

“Naw, I’ma stay out here,” Kashus interjected. Before I could protest, he had already found a seat on a nearby bench in the waiting area. His eyes were on his phone. He was disinterested. Sure, this was only the pre-operational appointment, but this wasn’t the support I wanted. Then again, what more could I ask for? He was here, so I guess I should be grateful.

“Follow me.” A tall, light-skinned woman led me back to a patient room. The moment I walked into the room, things took off at hyper-speed. I had to pee in a cup, get my blood drawn, and be hooked up to heart monitoring machines. It was all happening so fast my head was spinning, and the reality that I was having a life-changing surgery for a man who couldn’t even offer his support was starting to set in.

“We’re all done with the pre-operation procedures. The last step is for you to speak with Dr. London. He likes to meet with all his patients before surgery, especially the patients from out of state.” The nurse punched a few things on the computer before moving to the door. I nodded my head. “He’ll be in shortly,” she said before leaving the room.

“Okay!” I called behind her, letting out a deep sigh. I sat there for a minute, thinking about nothing and everything simultaneously. Pulling my phone out, I texted Kashus to let him know I was almost finished with my appointment. I watched as the speech bubbles appeared and then disappeared. I didn’t know what was so hard about saying okay, but before I could contemplate it any longer, the door swung open, and my head darted up.

“Hello, Ms. Iris. I’m Dr. London.” The surgeon entered the room. Immediately, my breath caught in my throat. Memories flooded my brain, and I realized this was the fine stranger from the club last night. The one that had poured tequila down my throat and made me wet the seat of my panties. What were the odds? I’d never actually seen my surgeon. His website pictures were patient photos of his work, and all my virtual consultations had been with nurses. My eyes roamed him. His features were gorgeous. His deep complexion coated his skin so well that the heavy tattoos on his neck and hands were nearly invisible. The white doctor’s coat he wore didn’t hide his thick arms and wide shoulders. I felt crazy for the way I was gazing at this man, but I couldn’t look away.

“Ms. Iris… um.” Dr. London stumbled over his words. His eyes were on me. The look in them told me he recognized me too. He cleared his throat, looking from me to the woman he’d walked in with. “This is

Samara. She is the nurse practitioner here. She'll be in the operating room tomorrow for your surgery."

I nodded my head as he spoke.

"Nice to meet you!" Nurse Samara waved and took her place in the corner.

"I checked all your labs. Everything looked outstanding for the operation." His voice carried a smooth, professional tone. It was still laced with grit but a stark contrast from the rugged man I had encountered at the club. The man standing before me was professional. The switch up was sexy.

"Ms. Iris!" Dr. London called, shaking me out of the trance he had me in. I should have been focused on my surgery, but his presence was clouding my judgment.

"Um, yeah… I'm sorry, can you repeat that? I zoned out." I stumbled over my words, trying to regain my focus.

Dr. London cleared his throat. "It's okay. It's natural for patients to have nerves."

I nodded. I wondered if he was as shaken up about this as I was. He pulled out two large photos of my body. One was my current body with scribbles, and the other was a photoshopped version of what I would look like after the procedure.

"I've looked at your digital mock-ups. Let's look at your problem areas. Hop off the table, and let's have a look." He extended his hand to help me down off the table. "Lift your gown."

I did nervously. He'd seen my naked body in pictures already, but something about being naked in front of him, bearing my imperfections, made me feel nervous, and I didn't know why. Yes, I did. It was the magnetic pull I'd felt since he entered the room. Really, since I'd seen him at the club. I watched as he rolled over to me on his metal stool. His hand slid down my belly as he examined my body. Nurse Samara had moved closer. She was scribbling down what I assumed were notes in a notepad. Dr. London's hands gripped my lower belly. He gazed up at me and then back down.

"Samara, can you step out for a minute?" He instructed her. Samara gave him a weird look before she eventually exited the room. Confusion registered on my face as he stood and moved close to me before he lowered my hospital gown down, covering my naked body.

“I can’t do the surgery,” he blurted.

“Hm?” I had to be hearing him incorrectly. “What do you mean?”

“I see a lot of women in this office, none as naturally beautiful as you. So, I’m confused as to why you’re here.”

His words caught me off guard, and my body stilled.

“Huh?” I’d heard him, but maybe if he repeated it, I could wrap my head around what he said.

“Give me a good reason why you’re here trying to fix something that ain’t broken. Your body is perfect.”

I couldn’t respond. My words were caught in my throat. I didn’t know if I would be if I wasn't required to be here. I loved every flaw on my body, or at least I did before Kashus made me feel bad about them. I couldn’t tell my surgeon that, though. I couldn’t tell this man that I was contracted to change my body so my fiancé would like me. I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out, and I dropped my head.

“I don’t know,” I mumbled a partial truth.

OceanofPDF.com

Dr. London

The moment I walked into her patient room and saw her I was heated. *What the fuck she trying to fix?* I had to take a minute and rub my eyes in disbelief. Of all the places I expected to see her again, this wasn't one of them. Her beautiful chocolate skin had invaded my dreams all night. That was huge because I'd never fantasized about a woman after such a brief encounter. She wasn't all done up like last night, but I could still recognize her. Her natural beauty was breathtaking, and it was hard for me to keep my composure.

I knew my sister Samara could tell I was off by the way she kept looking at me. She would give me shit about asking her to leave later, but I didn't want her in here for what I was about to say and do. I loved my little sister, but if I let her in on too much of my business, she became a pain in my ass. I didn't need that right now. Right now, I just wanted to know why the woman in my dreams wasn't happy with what she saw in the mirror.

"Give me a good reason why you're here trying to fix some shit that ain't broken. Your body is perfect." I could tell my bluntness caught her off guard. I wasn't speaking to her as her surgeon but as a real ass nigga.

"I don't know." Her voice was soft and meek.

"You don't know?" I repeated, confused.

She humped her shoulders in response then buried her beautiful face into her hands. I stared at her for a moment. She was mentally broken, but her body… her body was perfect. Nothing needed to be fixed on her. She

certainly didn’t need breast implants and a Brazilian butt lift. She had a belly pouch that fit her frame and gave her just the right amount of curve. I couldn’t see anything wrong with her, and it pissed me off that she did. Better yet, it pissed me off that her bitch ass fiancé had even approved of this.

I stared at her. I didn’t know why this shit was affecting me like this. I’d operated on thousands of women that didn’t have anything wrong with them and didn’t give a fuck. I was in the business of profiting off of people's insecurities. This time, though, it was different and had me fighting the urge to pick her up and carry her out. This, being my place of business, was the only thing stopping me.

The uncertainty in her eyes was screaming for help, so I wrapped my arms around her. She needed a hug. I didn't care that I was violating so many ethics codes by holding her like this, but I couldn’t walk away. She needed someone, and at that moment, I didn’t mind if that was me.

“As your surgeon, I don’t advise you to get the procedure done unless you’re one hundred percent sure why. I’m sorry, beautiful, but I can’t approve you for the procedure.” I was trying to be gentler and give her a more professional answer. Lifting her chin from my chest, I gazed deep into her eyes. One thing I had learned from being bread to be a Capo was how to read people. Her brown eyes locked on mine. There was so much sadness in them. Sadness I didn’t think surgery would fix. Sadness that ran deeper than me denying her procedure. It made me wonder who had put it there. Who had hurt her? I wanted to know her story.

“What… no… um. I know why.” She waved her hands in the air, trying to will the words out of her mouth. “I want to have more confidence in myself.” Her tone was shaky. It sounded like she was trying to convince herself more than me.

“Who you trying to convince?”

Her eyes bulged, and I could see the moment she put up her defensive walls.

“I don’t have to convince you. You’re getting paid to operate.” She snapped as she pulled herself off my chest. Her attitude was cute. She thought she was in control. She wasn’t. It didn’t matter what she said. When I sent Samara out of the room, I’d already decided I wasn’t going to operate on her. I had the right to reject patients I didn’t deem mentally stable. Ms.

Iris wasn’t crazy, but I could tell she wasn’t getting cosmetic surgery for the right reasons.

“You do, though.” I removed my gloves and moved over to the sink to wash my hands.

“What are you doing? Are you leaving?”

I nodded. I wanted to say more to her, but I rejected the urge. Everything I wanted to say was unprofessional, and the last thing I needed was a lawsuit.

“No, you don’t understand… I have to get this done. I came all this way, and my wedding is in three months.” The mention of her wedding had me turning to face her. A light bulb went off in my head that caused the veins in my forehead to throb. She was doing this to please her wack ass fiancé. She was a stranger. I didn’t know anything about her that wasn’t in my charts but knowing she felt the need to change her body to make another nigga happy had me pissed.

“Are you doing this for that nigga?” I barked, causing her to jump where she stood before her head dropped again.

“It’s complicated,” she mumbled.

“I’m not approving you for surgery. Your body is perfect.” I walked away from her. I needed to tread lightly because she was still a patient.

“No wait, you don’t understand. I have to get this surgery.” She was trailing behind me. Her soft voice weakened me and had me turning around to face her. She was beautiful, and I couldn’t deny my attraction to her. I would be lying if I said my attraction wasn’t playing a huge part in my decision not to do her surgery because it was.

“Changing your body for that nigga won’t make him love or respect you any more than he does now.” It was the truth. A lot of women went under the knife to appease a man. They used surgery to try and make him stay or make him happy. I’d had dozens of them come through my office, but Monroe Iris, my chocolate dream, I couldn’t allow her to make this mistake. She deserved better. She stared at me for a moment. Her eyes were on me, but I could tell she was thinking.

“I… I… he… I can’t leave Miami without getting my body done. We can pay you double,” she offered. There was no amount of money she could throw at me to make me concede. I shook my head.

“Get somebody else to do it. I’m not taking part in you changing your body for a nigga that cheats on you to your face.” The look on her face let

me know that referencing what I'd witnessed at the club last night was too much for her. I wasn't the type to sugarcoat things for people's feelings. I was blunt, but hurting Monroe's feelings made me instantly feel bad.

"This is unprofessional… and stupid. We've already paid you."

"I'll process a refund. You have my answer, Ms. Iris. This appointment is over." I'd already been here way too long and said way more than I should. Without looking back, I walked out of the room. She was a stranger. Plastic surgery wasn't my decision to make for her. It was her body, her choice. I just couldn't be the one to do it.

"What was that?" Samara's voice shook me from my thoughts as soon as I stepped in the hallway.

"Mind your business, Samara," I shot back as I pushed past her. I didn't know what to say. I didn't feel like explaining myself to my little sister.

"This is my business, Ro. I work here!" Samara snapped as she followed behind me. I knew her nosy ass wasn't going to go away. This was the first time I had sent Samara out of the room without explanation. I stared at my sister. I could have thought of a lie, but I didn't lie, not even about small shit like this.

"I wanted to speak with Ms. Iris alone. She seemed a bit uncomfortable." It was a half-truth, but it wasn't a lie. Samara stared up at me. Her narrowed eyes told me she didn't believe me.

"Unh huh, I'll let you have it 'cause I'm on lunch break, and it's not like you give us a lot of time to eat anyway." She pointed her finger at me. "This not over, brother." She trotted off down the hall toward the break room.

"It is, and you can always go work for Dad!" I shouted behind her.

"I will when you do." She shot back, flipping me the middle finger before disappearing into the break room. I could hear Rebecca laughing as I approached the front desk. She always got a kick out of me and Samara's back and forth. Everyone here respected me as their boss, but to Samara I was just her big brother. She stayed pressing my buttons, and I stayed on her nerves. It was our dynamic, and I wouldn't change anything about it—not even her working here. It made me proud that I was able to give her a chance to live a normal life free of the cartel.

If I had taken my birthplace as Capo, Samara would have been alongside me as my logistics manager, laundering money and trafficking drugs. When I became a doctor, she followed in my footsteps and went to

school to be a nurse. I was setting the tone for a new family legacy, and that was my motivation.

“You two crack me up. You know that?” Rebecca giggled just as Monroe’s patient room door flew open. The sound of the door crashing into the wall caused everyone to stop and look.

“Take Ms. Iris off the schedule. She didn’t pass mental clearance.” I informed Rebecca just as Monroe walked out of the room. Her quick steps made it obvious that she was angry. I didn’t think I’d ever seen a chocolate girl flush red before, but as she neared the exit, the red hue in her skin glowed brighter. I couldn’t help but stare at her. Even angry she was perfection. Her hard steps gave her fat ass just the right amount of jiggle.

“Should I make her eligible for rebooking?” Rebeca questioned, pulling my eyes away from Monroe.

“No,” I confirmed just as she approached the front desk. Her eyes landed on me briskly before she rolled them and cut them away, returning her attention to Rebecca.

“Hello, um do you remember the guy who I came here with? My fiancé. He was waiting over there.” She pointed to an empty seat in the waiting room.

“Yes,” Rebecca replied.

“Did you see where… um or did he say where he was going? My phone died.”

“Oh, yes he left a message for you. Hold on let me find it.”

That nigga left her here. Anger coursed through my veins again as I listened in on her conversation. I didn’t know Kashus Grant outside of what Meechie had told me about him, but from what I’d seen, he didn’t give a damn about his fiancée. It made me want to shoot my shot with her even more. I watched as Monroe tapped on the table nervously while Rebecca fondled with the papers on the desk. I should have minded my business, but something pulled me toward her, beckoning me to be her savior.

“I can call you a car to the recovery house. I saw on your charts that’s where you're staying. You’re welcome to stay there as long as you need,” I offered. Her head lifted in my direction, and her eyes darkened.

“Fuck you!” she spat, causing me to grab my chest. If looks could kill, I would be six feet under. I didn’t expect her vulgar language, but it turned me on. I liked my women with some spice. I wouldn’t push it today, though. There was a lot I needed to look into before I made a move on her.

“Oop! Oh… um! Got it!” Rebecca stuttered, darting her eyes between me and Monroe. She was caught off guard. Nobody spoke to me that way except for Samara.

“It says… call Rah when you are finished.”

Monroe nodded and moved away from the desk. Her body language showed defeat. Her face showed anger. She slumped over to a waiting room chair. My feet moved toward her again. Something about Monroe Iris was speaking to me, and I didn’t know if I should act on it or let it be.

“Please, leave me alone!” She barked as I neared her. I wanted to tell her to shut up and let me be her savior, but that might have been too much. Instead, I turned and retreated to my office, where I watched her on the security cameras. Every tear that fell from her eyes reassured my decision. Monroe Iris needed someone with the resources to help her out of her current situation, which may very well be me. I just needed to get her away from her fiancé. Picking up my phone, I dialed Meechie. If anyone could get information on Monroe, it would be him. Meechie had Homeland Security on his payroll. It was the luxury of being head of the London Cartel.

“Sup, bro!” he answered on the third ring.

“I need someone to pull the information on Monroe Iris and her fiancé Kashus Grant!”

The phone was quiet before Meechie burst out laughing.

“One encounter, and we about to snatch a nigga bitch?” His statement came out as more of a question.

“Chill on the bitch word. She showed up in my office today.”

“Word?”

“Yeah, that nigga making her get her body done.” I exhaled a breath I ain’t know I was holding.

“The real curvy girl we saw last night?”

“Yeah.”

“And that shit bothering you because you think she's perfect.” Meechie called it correctly.

“Yeah.” It was no use in denying it.

“I got Jared on it, nigga.” Jared was the tech guy that Meechie used to gather information. With him looking into Monroe, I would have a file on her by tonight.

“We going to war behind a female?” He was snickering, but I knew he would have my back no matter what. Meechie had been down for many of my shenanigans since we were kids. It didn’t matter how dangerous or silly they were. Meechie was gon’ ride first and ask questions later.

“Yeah, man.” I sighed. The phone fell quiet again.

“Well then, let me alert the shooters!” he shouted.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

"Every plastic surgeon in the Miami area is booked this week, Tessa! Booked!" I shouted into the phone. I was having a mental breakdown. "What the fuck am I going to do?"

I plopped down on the hotel loveseat. It felt like the first time I'd sat down since I'd left Dr. London's office. I couldn't believe he'd refused to give me surgery. It had thrown me off. It was none of his business why I was getting my body done. His job was to operate, not be a damn psychologist.

Leaning back on the couch, I made myself comfortable. Thanks to Dr. London, I'd been franticly moving around, calling, and dropping by plastic surgeons' offices all day, attempting to find someone to do my surgery. Four hours later, I'd come up with nothing. After retreating to my hotel room, I'd resorted to calling plastic surgeons in other areas. It didn't matter how much money I'd thrown at them, the story was the same. There were no openings. The earliest availability was at an office in Arizona six weeks from now.

The timeframe wasn't ideal because it didn't give me enough time to heal before the wedding, but if it was my only hope, I would have to take it. I wanted to scream! I was done crying. I wished my fiancé was here to help me sort this out, but Kashus had left. He'd hopped on his private jet and returned home with only a text message as to why. Maybe my brain was foggy, but I wasn't even surprised or upset by his actions. It was on brand for Kashus. He was a selfish asshole, but what could I do about it? I wasn't

getting the surgery now, so what did it matter? Maybe this was for the best. If Kashus couldn't support me through this, should I be changing my body for him?

"First, you're going to calm down," Tessa instructed, bringing my attention back to her. I held up the phone. Staring at her puffy caramel face, I admired her beauty and calmness. My little brother or sister had been treating her well. She was glowing.

"I'm sorry, Tessa. I… I… I don't know what I'm going to do." I was so upset I was stuttering.

"Why did the doctor deny the procedure again?"

"He said I didn't need it… and then he started asking me all these questions I couldn't answer." I didn't know why I'd frozen like that in his office. I knew what answers I was supposed to give, but I couldn't find the words in his presence. He made me nervous, made me feel vulnerable… Like I was in a safe place. I didn't realize he would cancel my procedure.

"You don't need it, and what type of questions did he ask?"

"Stupid shit, like why I wanted the surgery and if Kashus was making me do it," I whined. "You know, stuff I couldn't answer!"

Tessa giggled, most likely from my dramatics.

"And if you can't answer them, then you don't need to be getting surgery. I agree with the surgeon," she replied, causing my mouth to drop.

"Tessa, you're not helping."

"What? You know I'm against this whole thing. If I'd known putting your body on an operating table was part of this deal, I would have never let it happen." Tessa rolled her eyes. She was more pissed than I was when we found out what my father had agreed to. By that time, it was too late. I was living with Kashus, and he'd already started combining his business with my father's.

"I'm sure it was nothing you could have done about the surgery arrangement. You know that man is stubborn. He wants me married to Kashus Grant, no matter the cost."

"Please, your father may be big and bad to everyone else, but not to me. He's really sweet and understanding. I'm going to talk to him," she replied, making me roll my eyes. Something had shifted in Tessa and my father's marriage since I'd left. They seemed to be in a real marriage. It made my skin crawl sometimes when she tried to discuss their love life, but most of the time, it made me angry. She spoke of my father in a way I'd never met

him. He wasn’t any of the things for me or my mother growing up that he is for her, and it pissed me off.

“Don’t bother, Tessa.” I huffed. We sat in silence for a moment as I thought about what was next. If I couldn’t get the surgery, would the wedding be called off? Would it be pushed back? My father had made it clear that my only option was to marry Kashus or be forced into the real world alone. Sometimes, I thought about taking all the money I could and fleeing but staying in the familiar beat out the unknown every time in my head.

“You know anybody that ever left this life behind, Tessa?”

“Nobody that survived.” Tessa sighed.

“J-I…”

A knock on the door caused me to stop talking. My head swiveled to look at the front door of my hotel room. I tapped my phone to glance at the time. It was nine o’clock at night, and everybody who knew I was here, except for Rah, was thousands of miles away. I stared at the door for a moment, contemplating if I should open it. Rah had his own key, plus his room was a conjoining one.

“Was that a knock?” Tessa questioned, causing me to jump.

“Yes, I don’t know who it could be,” I replied. Another round of knocks rang out, forcing me to stand and move to the door. Whoever it was wasn’t going away without an answer. I leaned over to peek out the peephole as I approached the door. *What?* I pressed my head into the door as if it would give me a better look at the tall, chocolate masterpiece waiting for me to answer. *Dr. London?* My eyes had to be deceiving me. What was he doing here?

“Who's at the door?” Tessa’s voice thundered through the phone, making me jump back from the door.

“It’s him!” I was nervous. I didn’t understand why. My heart suddenly was beating uncontrollably.

“Him who? Monroe, stop speaking vaguely!”

“The doctor. Dr. London. My plastic surgeon.” I pressed my forehead back to the peephole. This time, I was met with his handsome smirk. He knew I was looking. Oh my God, he could hear me through the door.

“Are you going to open it?” Tessa questioned. “Maybe he changed his mind.”

Was I going to open it? I didn't know. Dr. London showing up at my suite was strange. How would he have known where I was staying? I didn't accept his offer to stay at the recovery house. Instead, I'd gotten a presidential suite at a luxury hotel. I didn't need any reminders of the surgery that wouldn't be.

"Your father just walked in. Answer the door. I'll call you back."

"Maybe you should stay on the phone. What if he's some psycho killer?" I whispered.

Tessa laughed. "I doubt it, Monroe. The man is a doctor." She huffed, probably tired of my theatrics. "If I don't hear from you in five minutes, I'll call Rah. Ten, and I'll send a team."

Dr. London knocked again.

"Answer the door, bye." Tessa disconnected the call before I could say anything else.

"Open the door, Monroe," I coached myself, letting the air in my lungs release into a deep breath. Without any more hesitation, I opened the door.

"Dr. London?" It came out as more of a question than a greeting.

"Do you want out?" His thick voice and sexiness greeted me. He wasn't in his scrubs and white coat anymore. He'd replaced it with a white T-shirt and sweats.

"Out?" I repeated as I stared at him. What did he mean out?

"Out of your arrangement with Kashus Grant. That's what you're in, right? An arrangement?" He pushed past me and entered my room, closing the door behind him. His words caught me off guard at first. Then I remembered he'd been at Kashus's birthday party. He was in his private area, which meant they were acquainted. Kashus had probably told him about us.

"Is he making you get your body done?" His eyes bounced around the room before finding mine. "You here alone?" He rambled another question. My heart beat rapidly as so many thoughts filled my head. I looked toward the door to Rah's room.

"My security is here… in the next room." I pointed toward the door. That was stupid. I may have just given him the ammunition he needed to kill me or something. I clenched my phone in my hand, preparing to redial Tessa.

He ordered, "Get all your personal belongings. Leave the phone."

“I… I… you… um… Dr. London.” I stumbled over my words. I was speechless. His boldness had grabbed a hold of my tongue. I couldn’t form a single coherent thought. I needed to pull it together, but the closer he got to me, the more my executive functioning skills seemed to fail.

“Royale.” He neared me. “My name is Royale. Most people call me Ro.”

I just stared at him. The oxygen fled my brain. I didn’t think I’d ever been this discombobulated in my entire twenty-eight years of life. There were so many questions I should have been asking. I should have called Tessa back or made a run for Rah’s door. This man was crazy, but as I stared at him, I only saw an answer to every question I was just asking Tessa. *What if I fled?*

“Are you here to discuss my surgery?” I questioned, maybe I was hallucinating. I needed clarity on why he was here.

“Not at all. I’m here to free you.” He closed the space between us.

“Free me? I’m confused, Dr. London. What are you talking about?” He didn’t respond. Instead, I felt his hand brush over my face and pull me in closer. His touch awakened everything in my body. This was crazy, and everything in me told me to push him away, but I couldn’t. The same weird urge seemed to wash over me every time he was in my presence.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, Monroe, and after today, you’ll never be in the position where you don’t feel as beautiful as you are. Where you don’t have a say so in your body.” He leaned his head down. His lips were inches away from mine.

“I want to kiss you. Is that cool?” he whispered. I should have said no. I didn’t know this man, but I needed to feel his lips as I melted into his grasp.

“Ye—” My words were cut off by his lips crashing into mine. I opened my mouth to welcome his tongue. The sensation that shot through me was nothing I’d ever felt. His lips stayed on mine as he backed me into the wall. Everything about this was crazy and dangerous. I was promised to Kashus. I could be killed for allowing another man this close to me to touch me in this manner, but I couldn’t stop. I didn’t have control over my own body anymore. Dr. London was in control.

“Fuck,” he moaned as he backed me into the wall. “I’m not here for sex or to force you to do anything you don’t want to do.” His hands roamed my body. “But your body is talking to me. Can I answer it?”

The air drained from my lungs, and a muffled yes escaped my lips. Dr. London bent his knees and lifted me into the air. When he positioned my thick thighs around his neck and shoulders, I nearly came on myself. I could feel his breath on my panty-less clit. I didn't know what this man was doing to me, but I was pleased.

"Can I taste you, Monroe?" His breath tickled my clit, causing me to let out a breathy moan. I loved the way he asked me for my permission. Years of being told what to do and never having a say had me dripping wet at a man who gave me an option.

"Yes!" I moaned as his lips latched onto my flower, sending pleasure shooting through my body. I arched my back against the wall and gripped his head to allow him more access to my center. The way Dr. London was feasting on me should have been a crime. The man had my pussy making macaroni sounds from the flip of his tongue.

"That's it. Let all those sweet juices go in my mouth." He coached as I rolled my hips on his shoulders. He gripped my ass, holding me still, and continued to devour me.

"Oh my God! Dr. London!" I muffled my cries in my hands, not wanting to alert Rah. This whole thing could go left in a matter of minutes if Rah was to come in and catch us.

"I'm not your doctor anymore." His voice was low and demanding, aiding his tongue in sending me over the edge.

"Dr. London!" I threw my head back in pleasure.

"Say it again." He slid his thick fingers into me. I could feel the exact moment that he hooked my G Spot. My vision blurred, and my mind grew foggy. Suddenly, I couldn't remember what his name was.

"Fuck!" I moaned.

"Say it again!" He smacked me on my ass and pulled me in closer. I loved the way he handled me. It was just the right amount of roughness mixed with care. I could stay in this moment forever.

"Say that shit! I love it."

"Dr. London!" I moaned loudly.

"This sweet pussy is perfect. Do you hear me, Monroe? You're perfect. Say that shit!" He demanded.

"I'm perfect! Fuuuck! I'm cumming!" My legs trembled around his neck as he intensified his movements, moving his fingers in and out of my wet, throbbing pussy.

“That’s right. Cum in my fucking mouth, with yo’ perfect ass!” He latched onto my clit, causing my juices to spill onto his face.

“Yes!” I was panting and squirming. I needed to get away from this man for so many reasons, but he held onto me, never letting go of my pearl. Tears cascaded down my cheeks from the pleasure. Relaxing my back on the wall, I gave in and allowed Dr. London to suck on my clit and dip his fingers in and out of me. This was a connection I didn’t know I needed, and as my legs quaked around his neck again, I knew I was going to leave with this man. I didn’t want to marry Kashus. Being bonded forever to him would mean I’d live the rest of my life being disrespected. I didn’t want that. I wanted to be free to fall in love with someone who cherished me.

One last orgasm shot through my body, causing my legs to quake once more. I hoped the universe wouldn’t be cruel and allow Dr. London to be anything less than my knight in shining armor.

OceanofPDF.com

Dr. London

As her thick legs quaked around my neck, I wanted nothing more than to bury myself deep inside of her, but I had already ventured off task. The plan was to come and snatch her up out of this bullshit ass arranged marriage, not snatch her soul through her pussy. That's not what she needed, but as soon as I saw her beautiful chocolate skin and smelled the sweet scent of her juices, I couldn't resist the urge to taste her. If I got it out of my system, maybe I could focus enough to do what I'd come here for —to help her out of her situation.

I had Meechie put eyes on Monroe when she left my office, and that was how I knew she hadn't checked in to the recovery house.

I was supposed to wait a day or two before making my move. I had all my options and went over my plan a thousand times, but somehow, my drive from the gym to home had turned into me sitting outside of her five-star hotel. Monroe didn't deserve to spend another day being treated like she was. Not when I had the resources and the willpower to free her.

Lowering her to the ground, I retreated to a bar stool at the counter, watching Monroe regain her composure. I knew I had just thrown her for a loop, so I waited a few minutes before speaking.

"Do you want out?" I asked her again.

"It's not that simple. Kashus… my father… they." She stumbled over her words, her eyes bouncing around the room. I didn't like how she was afraid to make eye contact with me. She was ashamed of her situation.

“That’s not what I asked you, Chocolate.” I motioned her toward me, calling her the nickname that had been running through my mind. She came, no questions asked. “I said, do you want out?” I wrapped my arms around her waist, bringing her body into mine. She felt perfect. She didn’t say anything for a moment. I knew all the things that must have been floating through her head. I was practically a stranger offering her something that probably seemed unattainable.

It had taken Jared three hours to get back to me and give me the rundown on Monroe and Kashus’s fucked up arranged marriage. It made me cringe that people today still practiced such bullshit, but a lot of crime families arranged marriages. It was their way of assuring the family business lived on. I was lucky that my family didn’t partake, but Monroe’s was in deep. It looked like every woman in her family had been arranged to be married. It was fucked up, and it changed the motivation for why I was doing this. I stared down at Monroe. We were alike in wanting to be free of the predestined rules of our families. Maybe that was why the universe had sent her to me.

“Yes, I want out,” she finally replied. “But how would that work? Where would I live? How would I make money? What would happen to my family?” She was rambling off a bunch of questions and concerns. I touched her lips, signaling for her to stop. The more questions she asked, the less likely she was to do this. Her questions were only fueling fear and doubt. The yes was all either of us needed.

“Grab anything that means something to you. Everything else, leave it. I’ll replace it. I’ve taken care of your living arrangements.” Her eyes ballooned as I spoke.

“Now?” There was so much concern in her eyes—so much fear. I would make sure she never had to feel any of those things again.

“Yes, call whoever you were just on the phone with and reassure them that you’re okay… leave the phone. When they realize you’re missing, it’s the first thing they’ll track,” I told her. Again, she stood there staring up at me. Her big doe-shaped eyes were searching mine.

“You trust me?” I posed the question aloud that was occupying her brain.

“Strangely, I do,” she replied.

“Then let’s move. I’m going to go visit your security. When you are ready, take the back staircase down to the first floor. A guy will meet you

and take you to my car. His name is Polo. This is him. Any questions?" I turned my phone around to show her a picture of Meechie's brother, Polo.

"No questions, just a request. Please don't hurt Rah."

My eyebrows bunched together at her request. I cocked my head sideways. I couldn't blame him if he had been fucking her. Monroe was beautiful and neglected. The perfect combination for any nigga looking to fuck.

"You fucked him?" I wanted to know.

"What? No! Rah is gay!" she shouted.

"Good!" Me killing her security was never a part of the plan because I didn't have to. When Kashus and Mr. Iris discovered Monroe missing, they would kill him for not doing his job.

"I won't hurt Rah," was all I offered her as I pecked her on the forehead.

"See you in fifteen minutes, Chocolate." I walked out of her hotel room. I would have someone grab her security guard in the morning and take him to the warehouse until all this was over. Having him put up somewhere would be the only way to secure his safety. It wasn't the plan I'd discussed with Meechie, but I couldn't start this thing with Monroe off with her being mad at me for not following her wishes. My phone dinged, letting me know Polo was in place as I left the hotel room and took the elevator to the lobby. The task was simple: Get Monroe out of there without anyone ever seeing her leave. Polo and I had run this play a thousand times before when we oversaw moving cocaine. One body shouldn't be any different.

"Have a good day, sir." The guard gave me a head nod as I exited the building.

"You too, my guy," I replied. That was his cue to black out the hotel security cameras so there would be no trace of Monroe leaving the building. The cameras would show her going to get ice and coming back. It was a camera trick that would cost me twenty thousand dollars. Climbing in my black Lamborghini, I took off toward the location where I would meet Polo and Monroe. It was a small parking garage about two blocks away that had busted security cameras. I pulled into the spot and waited about five minutes before getting out and walking over to the black SUV that was waiting for me.

"Nigga, you ain't tell me she didn't know the plan." Polo swung the door open and exited the back of the SUV before I could even touch the door handle.

“I didn’t want to stress her.” I shrugged. “How’d she do?”

Polo cocked his head to the side and closed the door of the SUV. Just like his brother, he was a fool. Polo was a lot more animated than Meechie, though. I stared at him as he walked up to me.

“I ain’t want to talk about shorty to her face, but that girl is bougie and way chattier than ten bricks of cocaine.” He spoke just above a whisper, but his tone was serious as fuck causing me to laugh. I may have omitted a few details from Monroe, but they were for her own good and mine. I wanted her to agree to come with me. I didn’t want to scare the girl off.

“I appreciate you getting her here safely.” I dapped him up.

“We brothers, nigga, any time. It was fun hitting a lick with you again. This means you getting back in the field?” he questioned. It was valid, but it wasn’t fun for me. The only reward in this was freeing Monroe.

“Naw, just doing this for her.” I nodded toward the car.

“She is bad. I see you.” He nodded.

“Don’t be looking at her like that, nigga.”

Polo laughed. “I’m just complimenting your choice, nigga. I know that’s you.” He walked off toward my Lamborghini.

“This is just business. I’m just helping a friend,” I replied nonchalantly.

“Yeah, okay.” He shrugged.

“Don’t scratch my shit!” I yelled at him as I climbed into the car. Monroe’s eyes lit up at the sight of me. I could tell she had been scared. Seeing me seemed to bring her some relief. I liked that. I planned to be her peace for the rest of her life.

“You good, Chocolate?” I leaned in and kissed her on the forehead. This must have been a lot for her. She was leaving her life behind in the blink of an eye with no more than promises from a stranger.

“You didn’t tell me I was gon’ have to climb into a damn trash can,” she spat, causing me to burst into laughter. Images of what Polo must have had to endure flashed through my head.

“I didn’t want to alarm you.” I smirked.

“Do I look like a climb in the trash type of girl?” She was rolling her neck.

“Naw, baby, you like the most precious thing on this planet, and that’s why I needed to get you out of there without being seen.” I signaled for the SUV to roll out of the parking garage.

“Yeah, well, now I need a shower. There was spoiled food and tampons in there.” Her face scrunched up, making me laugh again.

“You’ll be able to take a shower on the plane or when we get to our destination.” I smiled at her.

“Plane? Where are you taking me?” Her eyebrows scrunched.

“To paradise. Sit back and relax.”

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

Dr. London wasn't exaggerating when he said he was going to take me to paradise. We'd landed in Havana, Cuba thirty minutes ago. The night sky was doing nothing to hide the beauty of the scenery around me. The salty scent of the ocean air filled my nose as I followed Dr. London up the pathway to our villa. The villa sat on top of a hill and overlooked the beach.

"Here we are, Chocolate. This will be your home for the next couple of weeks." He opened the door just as I reached the stairs. "I hope this will do. I never had to host a mafia princess before." He ushered me inside. I welcomed the cool blast of air conditioning that greeted me as I stepped inside.

Dr. London closed the door behind us before moving around and turning on the lights. I left my eyes to gaze around the villa. It was beautifully decorated. It seemed more like someone's home than a vacation spot. I could tell the furniture was expensive, not like the cheap furniture they supplied in hotel rooms. I eyed the floor-to-ceiling windows and allowed my feet to take me to them. Even at night, the views were beautiful. I couldn't wait to see the views in the daytime.

"You like it?" Dr. London came alongside me and joined me in the window.

"This is perfect, thank you," I replied. The weight of what I had done swept over me. In a matter of hours, I'd left my entire life behind without

any questions asked. It was crazy, yet I'd never felt so at peace and free. Whatever the outcome, I was happy with my choice. Without warning, I turned to the man who had made this all possible and wrapped him in a hug.

"Thank you." I breathed into his chest. He wasted no time pulling me in closer.

"No thanks needed. Come here, let me show you around." He lifted me, and naturally, my legs wrapped around his waist. This was the second time this man had lifted me as if I weighed nothing, and I was in awe.

"This is the kitchen, as you can see. That over there is the living room…" He carried me to the staircase and up the stairs. Each step he took with me straddling the front of him made my pussy moist.

"This is the master bedroom. Down that hall, it's three more bedrooms." He pointed to a narrow hallway as we entered the master bedroom. I took note of how he wasn't even out of breath for having carried me up the stairs.

"This is where you'll be sleeping. Though you can pick any of the rooms." He set me down on the bed. I glanced around the room. It was beautiful and cozy. It looked like it was prepared for a queen.

"This is stunning," I mumbled. Dr. London kept talking.

"This is your closet. I had some things brought over for you already." He opened a door to reveal a large walk-in closet fully stocked with clothes. I could see tags and designer labels. That had to cost more than a few thousand dollars. My feet moved before my mind could catch up. Clothes were the key to my heart.

"You bought me clothes?" I grabbed one of the designer dresses off the hanger. "And you got the size right."

I couldn't fight back the smile that appeared on my face as I stared at the size twenty label on the tag. The dress was beautiful, and the designer I recognized because there weren't too many that carried my size. This dress was more than ten thousand dollars. My eyes shot to Dr. London. This was a lot. I added things up in my head. This villa… The private jet to Cuba… My new wardrobe. It all had to cost more than a million dollars. I knew plastic surgeons made a lot of money, but I didn't know they were making this much money.

"I hope I got your style right. You left all your belongings behind; it's the least I could do."

My eyes found his. This was so sweet, but I couldn't enjoy it because of the realization that there was more to Dr. London than his plastic surgery business.

"Is this like a rental home or something?" I threw the question out there.

"No, I own it. It's my home away from home," he replied, making my eyebrows raise. *A home away from home in Cuba!*

"I've been around gangsters and drug dealers my entire life… enough to know one when I see one. So, is the doctor thing just like a cover-up?" I blurted.

"I'm a plastic surgeon, you know that," he responded dryly.

"And? There has to be more. I'm not stupid."

He ignored me and walked into the bathroom. I could hear the water running as I stood there. I don't know why the thought of him being involved in the drug business made me so angry. He was associated with Kashus. I should have known. I guess I thought he was my fresh start. My something different. I was still standing there in thought when he returned. His lips were moving, but I was too in my head to listen.

"Monroe!" He touched my arm, causing me to come out of my thoughts. "I was heir to the London Cartel. I'm not anymore, but having the last name comes with its perks… like a trust fund… good credit… inherited properties. My father gifted me this house when I was five. Most people get a bike for their fifth birthday, I got a beachfront villa in Cuba."

I stood there frozen as he spoke. He was born into a crime family just like me, but he was a doctor—a surgeon. I needed to know more.

"Was the heir? What happened?"

"I wanted something different. I don't know if you can relate, but having a father as a kingpin, your whole life is mapped out for you. I wanted to make my own way—be my own man. The life of crime wasn't for me."

I nodded. His words were speaking to me, and suddenly, it was making sense why he'd recused me. He understood me in a way that nobody else could.

"It's been a long day. I ran you a bath. Relax. Get some rest. I'll see you in the morning for breakfast." He grabbed my hand and led me to the bathroom. I followed him.

"Wait, you're not sleeping here?"

“Guest room, down the hall. You need a lot of things tonight, and my dick etching its place in your soul isn’t one of them.” He kissed me once on the forehead before softly pecking my lips. I tried to push my tongue into his mouth, but he pushed me away.

“This” —He pointed between the two of us— “needs to chill. I crossed the line earlier, but I’m putting it back down. You’re here for your freedom.”

My eyebrows wrinkled as I listened to Dr. London reject me. I appreciated him trying to be respectful, but we both knew our attraction to each other was too strong to fight. It was only a matter of time before he had me bent over the balcony outside.

“Bathe, then sleep.” He pointed to the tub as he left the room. I watched him until he disappeared. Who knew when I’d picked a doctor that I would also be picking my savior? Slowly, I shed my clothes and climbed into the bathtub. The water wrapped around my body, relaxing every muscle. There were so many unknown variables in my life at the moment, but none of them fazed me. I was in another country free of Kashus… free of my father. I didn’t know how long I would be able to get away with this disappearance, but I was going to live every day like it was my last because if I was ever discovered, that was what it would be.

“You look beautiful,” Dr. London greeted me as I walked down the stairs.

I was wearing a yellow two-piece swimsuit set with a cute, long cover-up skirt. The set fit my body perfectly. I could barely tell I had a belly pudge. My body was giving hourglass. I was nervous about putting it on because of the amount of belly it showed. Kashus never wanted me to show my belly. The moment he crossed my mind. I knew it was the one. The first step in my freedom was taking back my confidence. Seeing Dr. London waiting at the bottom of the stairs smiling confirmed I’d made the right choice.

“Thank you, Dr. London,” I replied, taking him in. It made no sense for one man to be that fine. The white button-down shirt he wore showcased his muscular build along with the sky blue hoochie daddy shorts he had on. He

had to have a good stroke game with all the muscles that were on display in his legs. My mouth watered. Before Kashus, I'd been so closed off to men. Not even the finest man could get my attention, but Dr. London was too fine to ignore.

"Stop being so formal. I already had yo' pussy on my tongue, Monroe." He pulled me into a hug, making flashbacks of the way he'd feasted on me last night flood my memories. I'd never had anybody pick me up and devour me the way he had. We were past the formalities, but calling him Dr. London just came naturally.

"Sorry, I can't help it." I giggled.

"Royale or Ro will suffice." He removed his arms from around me.

"I'm not calling you either." I exhaled. "Besides, I like Dr. London." I walked away from him, being sure to put an extra switch in my hips.

"Is that right?" He followed me. I could hear the amusement and lust in his voice.

"Yeah, didn't you say this was business? Securing my freedom. I'm gon' keep it profe—" My words were halted by Dr. London's arms wrapping around my waist.

"You like playing with fire, huh? Just because I'm not trying to make this about sex, Monroe, doesn't mean I won't pick your thick ass up and push this dick all in yo' stomach." His strong arms tightened around my waist. I could feel his pelvis pressing against my ass. "I don't plan on going anywhere near professional with you again." He let go of my body, and it took me a minute to gather myself.

"Noted, London." I exaggerated his last name purposefully, leaving off the title. He didn't say anything at first just stared at me.

"I can accept that. Let's go eat. You ready?"

I nodded. The way I would follow this man to the ends of the earth was crazy, and I probably needed to be evaluated for it, but something about Royale London just made me feel safe. The safest I'd ever been in my life.

"Where to?" I sang, throwing my arm out from him to grab onto. Without hesitation, he grabbed my hand and led me out of the back door of the villa. The beauty of my surroundings engulfed me as we headed down a paved pathway. Cuba was beautiful last night when we arrived, but this morning it was breathtaking. I'd been to many islands before, but something about this one was speaking to me.

"This place is gorgeous," I boasted as we walked along the beach.

“It is. I like this area. It’s not flooded with tourists. Everyone here is a local.” He pointed to the houses nearby. I nodded, taking it all in. The landing was lined with villas identical to his.

“This is the quickest path into the market. There’s a ton of shops and restaurants there.” He led me up a flight of stairs. As we climbed, the sounds of bongos and maracas filled the air. This must have been the market London was telling me about. It was so lively and full of people of all skin tones.

“This is where we’ll be having breakfast. I may be biased, but this is the best restaurant in all of Havana,” London quipped as a beautiful oceanside café came into view. The smell of bacon sailed to my nose as we entered. Before we could get through the door a brown skinned, short woman came running toward us.

“Royale! I didn’t know you were dropping by. Ma is going to be happy to see you.” She pulled him into a hug, causing me to narrow my eyes at the interaction.

“It was kind of spontaneous. I’m just showing my lady friend around. Monroe, this is my cousin Alyza.” He pointed between the two of us. “Lyza, this is my lady friend Monroe.”

His introduction caught me off guard. *Lady friend!*

“Your lady friend?” She eyed him suspiciously. “You’ve never brought a woman around us before. You must be as special as you are beautiful.” Alyza turned to me.

“Nice to meet you.” I extended my hand to give her a handshake but was met with her arms around my torso.

“I’m a hugger,” Alyza mumbled in my ear before letting me go. “Ma met her yet?” She directed her attention back to London.

“No, go get her,” London ordered as we walked through the restaurant and onto the patio.

“Ma as in your mother?” I questioned as we took our seats in a small booth that overlooked the ocean.

“No, as in Alyza’s mother. My great aunt on my father’s side. She owns this place,” he stated nonchalantly, as if meeting his great aunt wasn’t a big deal. My body was stuck as nerves took over me. The look of fear was probably written all over my face.

“Don’t worry; she’s the sweetest.” He assured me. My leg bounced with anticipation as I stared at the menu in front of me.

“Are you close to her?” I was trying to wrap my head around how important this meeting was.

“Very. She raised my father after her sister passed away. She even raised me when my parents were young and in the streets. When my mother overdosed…” His voice cracked before continuing. “She’s more of a grandmother than an au—”

“My favorite nephew!” A curvy brown skinned woman appeared at our table. My eyes ran over her. She didn’t look old enough to be someone’s mother, let alone a great-aunt.

“Aunt Vanessa!” London stood to greet her.

“Nephew!” She kissed him on the cheek. “Who is this chocolate bombshell?” She turned to face me. London introduced us, and just like her daughter, she pulled me into a hug.

“Royale doesn’t bring women around. I almost broke my neck getting out of here to see who had gotten my baby sprung.” The booth filled with light laughter as she slid next to me, taking the menu out of my hand.

“No menu needed. I’m going to prepare everything we got for you. This is a celebration.” She was loud and animated, and I couldn’t help but giggle. My eyes bounced between London and his aunt. I was honored that I’d been the first woman he had brought around them, but the gravity of what that meant was forcing me to ruin the moment.

“Monroe will be staying at the villa for a couple of weeks,” he told her.

“Oh, a couple of weeks? I may have to put you to work. I can always use a helping hand around this place.” Aunt Vanessa pointed around the restaurant. I smiled at her invitation. Work was a new concept for me. I wasn’t allowed to get a job. It wasn’t considered to be ladylike. My father saw it as disrespectful for a woman to work. Women took care of the home, and that was it. I glanced at London.

“That would be okay with you?” I questioned, uncertainty lacing my voice.

“Why wouldn’t it be?” He stared into my eyes, causing me to drop my head. Shame filled me as I realized I’d let my past experiences seep into the moment. Just then, a loud crashing sound rang out in the kitchen.

“I gotta get back in there. I can’t leave them alone in my kitchen for too long. I’ll put you to work. Show you how to make some of Royale’s favorites.”

“I would love that.” I looked over at London. I knew how to cook a few things so I could please my husband, but it wasn’t my expertise. I’d grown up with a personal chef. I smiled and nodded as she scurried away from the table.

“She’s sweet, and I’m certain she’s found the fountain of youth.” I turned my attention back to London.

“Aunt Vanessa knows the secret to life—paving your own way and finding what brings you peace. She was the first person to get out of the family business. You can say I followed her lead.” The look in London’s eyes as he spoke about his aunt Vanessa was refreshing. The admiration and respect he had for her was breathtaking. Men didn’t admire women where I came from.

“That’s amazing. The women in my family were all married away before I could form any bonds with them.”

“Wow, I was going to ask you if there was anyone you wanted to send a message to… Let them know you're okay.”

I shrugged.

“It’s just been my father and I since my mother passed away. My dad is an only child so no aunts or uncles. I am close to Contessa, she’s married to my dad, but we have more of a sisterly bond. She’s only a few years older than me. She’s pregnant with my sibling. If my disappearance would disturb anyone, it would be her.”

He nodded as I talked.

“I can get a message to her. Her being married to your father, though, that’s risky.”

“Contessa wouldn’t rat me out. She knows this lifestyle.” I assured him. He nodded.

“I’ll get a message to her, Chocolate.”

His promise filled my heart. I knew Contessa would be worried sick about me. I would hate for her to have complications with her pregnancy because of me. My last sibling didn’t make it into this world, and I couldn’t imagine being the cause of losing this one.

Just like she’d said, Aunt Vanessa had prepared almost everything I could think of to eat for breakfast. I stared at the table. It was loaded with bacon, eggs, sausage, ham, French toast, pancakes, oatmeal, omelets, and fresh fruit. I didn’t know how two people were going to eat it all.

“Oh wow, this a lot of food.”

“Aunt Vanessa overdoes it sometimes. Whatever we don’t eat we can give to the kids over at the shelter. They love Aunt Vanessa’s leftovers. I’ll have them box it up, and we can drop it there on the way back.”

A man with a heart was the sexiest thing I’d ever seen. For a second, I stared at him.

“You good?”

“Yeah, umm, that’s a great idea.” I cut my eyes away from him and turned my attention to the food.

“Awesome, eat up. You need fuel. I got a lot to show you today.” London bit into a pancake. I began eating, but my eyes kept stealing glances of London. He was different—a breath of fresh air. I kept wondering when he would show his true colors and exercise his control over me, just like every man had done before him. Men weren’t capable of being my safe place because they would just take advantage of my weaknesses. The more I thought about it, the more I stared at London. *What is your flaw?*

“How’s your food?” London gazed up at me.

“Great! I may have overdone it. My food baby isn’t happy.” I rubbed my belly. I was stuffed from attempting to taste a little bit of everything. London’s aunt could really throw down. It had been a long time since I’d been able to eat like this without scrutiny. Kashus always had something to say about my weight. So much that I tiptoed around him to eat.

“I’ll have Aunt Vanessa box up the leftovers.” He flagged down one of the servers. When she arrived at the table, London instructed her on what he planned to do with the food. She nodded as she removed the leftovers from the table.

“We can take our time walking the beach on our way to the shelter,” London instructed.

“Yes, I need to walk off this food.” I laughed just as Alyza returned to our table with three bags of food.

“Ma prepared more food to drop by the children’s shelter.” Alyza set the bags on the table. “I can come with, if this is too much to carry,” she offered.

“Naw, I think we can manage. Tell yo’ ma I said thank you. We’ll be back by tomorrow.” London stood from the table.

“It was nice meeting you, Monroe. Ma said you’ll be here for a while. Maybe we can hang out sometime.”

“Maybe.” I turned to London. “Would that be okay?” He stared at me for a moment before answering.

“You don’t have to ask me permission. You are free to do what you want.” He shrugged. It was a habit for me to ask someone before I went or did anything. Places and people always had to be vetted first. My father didn’t want me to be around people who could potentially harm me, and Kashus just wanted me to stay locked up in the house so he could be free to do as he pleased.

“Anytime you get bored with Royale, hit me up. I’ll show you the fun places on the island. Here, put my number in your phone.”

I looked down, not sure what to say. I had left my phone back in Miami with my old life. “Um, I don’t have one… it’s um…”

“She broke it before she got on the plane. I gotta take her to get a new one today or tomorrow,” London interjected.

“Oh, okay, well, get it from London when you get your phone fixed. I gotta get back to work before my ma starts complaining.” She walked off waving.

“Okay, thank you!” I shouted as she disappeared into the kitchen.

“Come on now, Chocolate.” London took my hand and pulled me out of the booth. He guided me out of the restaurant. I could barely walk as we strutted along the water toward the shelter.

“So, a surgeon who was bred to be a gangster… Do you ever think about going back? Do you ever feel guilty for abandoning your family?”

That very thought had been plaguing my mind. Not marrying Kashus wouldn’t just affect me but my entire family. London smirked.

“In the beginning when I was in school, yes. My pops isn’t too happy about my decision. I haven’t felt guilty in a long time, though. I didn’t abandon my family. It’s quite the opposite. I’ve given my family a new path… a new beginning… an option. My sister Samara could have been moving cocaine across state lines, but because of me, she’s a nurse practitioner.”

I nodded my head as he spoke.

“Nurse Samara is your sister!” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” he replied as we continued to walk. London grabbed my hand, causing me to stop in my tracks.

“Sometimes choosing you can open the doors for others to do the same. Never feel guilty for choosing you—even if it’s over family.”

I took a deep breath as what he said took residence in my head. London had found a meaningful life outside of his family traditions. It gave me hope that I could one day have the same. As we walked, we talked more about our lives. It was so easy to talk to him. It felt like we'd known each other for more than a few hours.

"Here we are, Royale Children's Home." He pointed toward the small building that resembled a school. "Casita de ninos Royale," he repeated in Spanish.

"It's named after you." My eyebrows knitted together.

"Yeah, I own it." London guided me up the stairs of the shelter.

"You own a children's shelter?" My mouth dropped open. The more I learned about Dr. London, the more infatuated with him I became.

"Yeah, it's small right now—just about a dozen kids. They are all kids that have been affected by my family's cartel. They've either been abandoned by drug addicted parents or orphaned by cartel violence. Some have experienced both." He punched in a door code and turned the knob to open the door.

"This is really noble of you," I spoke.

"I've seen firsthand how drugs affect our communities. The children are the ones left to suffer most of the time. I can't change my family's past, but I can help to change the future."

I smiled as we walked into the shelter. This man had to be too good to be true.

"Royale!" Several children came running. They all wore different skin tones and facial features. Some were boys, and some were girls.

"I have food!" London held up the bags.

"From Vanessa's!" one of the boys shouted as he took the food out of London's hands and ran toward the kitchen. The rest of the kids followed him.

"Make sure everyone gets a fair amount!" London shouted behind them as I took in my surroundings. This was a nice place. The furniture resembled the kind that London had in his villa. He had the children living just as nice as he was, and that was saying a lot about his character.

A tall lady with beige skin walked up and greeted us. "I didn't know you were going to be making our Saturday drop-off from Vanessa's."

"It was last minute. I'm showing my lady friend around the island. I had to stop by and see the kids.

“Lady friend?” she questioned, her eyes growing big.

“Yes, Kamila, this is Monroe. Monroe, this is Kamila. She runs the shelter.”

“It’s nice to meet you. Will you all be joining us for breakfast?” she questioned.

“Another time. We just left Aunt V’s, and you know she fed us to death. I’ll be back by before I leave—maybe shoot some hoops with the kids,” London replied.

Kamila smiled. “They will love that. The kids love it when you visit.”

London shook Kamila’s hand, and we headed back out of the shelter and down the stairs. As the sun filled my line of vision and we strolled back onto the beach, I couldn’t help but think about how beautiful it all was. Everything about our morning had been beautiful. I was living in the moment… taking it all in. The sun was shining, the waves were crashing, and it felt like the whole world was mine for the taking.

OceanofPDF.com

London

Monroe was adjusting better than I thought she would. The last three days had gone by smoothly. All she wanted to do was get beautiful and explore the island, and I was finding joy in showing it to her. Every day that passed with her here in the villa confirmed that my impulsive decision to take her was the right one.

I pulled back a new layer of her damage each day. She was just starting to get out of the habit of asking me for permission. Monroe checked in with me about everything—what we would eat for dinner, where she should go, and how she should style her hair. Yesterday, she asked me if she could go out on the front porch. Her constant need to get every single decision approved showed me how damaged she was. It was so bad I made her swear to me that nigga hadn't been putting his hands on her. She said he hadn't, but physical abuse or not, the emotional and psychological abuse was apparent. It was even more reason why I was going to bury that nigga when it was time, and her father, too, for facilitating it.

"You gon' tell me what's really going on?" Aunt Vanessa interrupted my thoughts. I knew when she'd asked me to help take some things down to the shelter that she was going to bombard me with questions about Monroe.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I shrugged as I placed the last box on the counter.

"Oh, you know, and you better get to talking." Her arms were folded across her chest and her neck rolled. She meant business.

“I needed a vacation… figured I’d bring a friend.” I stared at her out of the corner of my eye. I was trying to gauge if that was satisfying enough.

“This not a vacation spot… lie again.” She tapped her foot on the floor, causing me to feel like a little knuckle head boy again. I stared at her, trying to figure out how to tell her about Monroe. It was no use in lying. If she was questioning it, she already knew something was up. Like she said, this wasn’t a vacation spot. This was my refuge.

“All right, so I’m helping Monroe out. She needed a place to stay for a while.”

“And you brought her here? Out of the country?” She twisted the corners of her mouth as if to call my bluff.

“Yeah.” I attempted to walk past her to the back door. The kids were outside shooting some hoops, and I had promised them a few games.

“Boy, if you don’t cut the crap. Is that girl in trouble or something? Are you in trouble?”

Deciding to fill Aunt Vanessa in on everything, I took a seat next to her. Maybe she could shine some wisdom on the situation that Meechie and Polo couldn’t.

“Monroe’s family believes in arranged marriages. She was arranged to be married to someone that didn’t mean her any good.”

Aunt Vanessa sat up on the couch. Her mouth opened and shut.

“I’m offering her an out.” I continued. “I brought her here to hide her from her fiancé and her father.”

“Royale.” She gasped. That probably wasn’t what she was expecting me to say.

“I know Aunt V.” I dropped my head.

“No, you don’t know! How long have you known this girl?”

“A day longer than you.”

“Royale, what the hell? Now I know your father and mother didn’t set a great example, but are you crazy? You got better sense than to bring a girl you just met here. What if this is all a setup? And if it’s not, do you know the consequences of interfering in something like that?” She was rightfully concerned. There were a lot of areas for concern.

“I considered all that, and I don’t care. I couldn’t leave her in that situation. He was going to force her to get work done on her body. The girl can barely decide for herself.”

Aunt Vanessa sat back on the couch. Her fingers strummed her face.

“Do we know this family? Who’s her father?”

“Jacob Iris, they’re out of—”

“Bristol City.” She finished my sentence, causing my head to spin in her direction.

“You know him?’ I questioned.

“Yes, your father does, too.” She said it calmly as if this revelation didn’t have my head spinning.

“What? How?”

“There weren’t that many black crime families back in the day. We liked to keep track of one another. Your father and I grew up with Jacob. I had a crush on him at one point, chile.” She giggled at the last part before continuing. “Jacob was always so serious about his duty to his family business. It was honorable until it wasn’t. The man didn’t care who you were. If you went against the beliefs of the mafia, he would have you handled.”

I listened to her speak about Monroe’s father. I would have never guessed that she’d known him. This may have been the inside information I needed.

“If Monroe is his daughter, nephew, I hope you have a plan. That man will rage a war over tradition.” Aunt Vanessa touched me on the knee.

“I had a plan, but the more I get to know Monroe, the less I want to go through with it.” I dropped my head into my hands.

“What is it, Royale?” she asked. I wasn’t scared of a lot of shit, but telling Aunt Vanessa what I had planned had me as nervous as a stripper on Easter Sunday. I stood from the couch putting a good distance between us. What I was about to say was no doubt about to get me slapped across the back of the head.

“The plan is to marry her,” I blurted.

“Marry?” She stood from the couch.

“Yes, she can’t be in an arranged marriage if she’s already married.”

Aunt Vanessa didn’t say anything. She just stared at me dumbfounded.

“Are you sleeping with the girl?” That wasn’t what I was expecting her to ask. I shook my head.

“No, but I ain’t gon’ sugarcoat it. I’m very attracted to her.” She didn’t need to know about me wrapping Monroe’s thick thighs around my neck the day when I got her.

“Royale,” was all she said as she rubbed her hand across her face.

“I know it’s a lot, Auntie… but I can’t let her go back to those people. I’ve never felt the urge to protect somebody so strongly before.”

Aunt Vanessa approached me, placing her hand on my back.

“Aw, baby. You're smitten with her.” She was smiling. I didn’t know if smitten was the right word, but Monroe had a nigga head gone. Every second I was around her, I contradicted myself. I couldn’t fall for her, but she was mine. I wanted her to have her freedom but didn’t want to let her out of my sight. It was fucked up, and I found myself being something I never thought I would be… a wishy-washy ass nigga.

“I guess you can say that. It’s why I can’t marry her.”

“And why you must,” Aunt Vanessa mumbled. She was speaking just above a whisper, but I heard every word.

“Royale!” Drake, one of the kids from the shelter, ran inside. “Are you going to come play with us?” he questioned. I glanced back at Aunt Vanessa. I knew better than to leave a conversation with her before I was dismissed.

“Go ahead, baby. We don’t have much more to discuss. I fully support you.” She waved me off.

“Thank you, Auntie.” I kissed her on the cheek before running outside with Drake. Her support meant a lot to me. If this was truly a fucked-up idea, she would have let me know.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” I approached Monroe as she sat by the beach. She’d been watching the tide for a few hours now. Since we’d been here, it was something that she did often. Usually, I let her be, but tonight, something compelled me to join her.

“It’s so peaceful. I could stare out at the water all day.” She looked up at me as I joined her in the sand.

“Yeah, I’ve spent a lot of time here just looking at the water. It helped me settle my mind a time or two.” I gazed between her and the ocean.

“My mind has been at war. On one hand, I’m the happiest I’ve ever been, but on the other, I feel guilty. Marrying to strengthen my family is something I always knew I had to do. I looked forward to it until I didn’t.”

I understood exactly where she was coming from. It was the same way I had felt when I chose to leave the cartel and become a surgeon.

“As a kid, I wanted nothing more than to follow in my father’s footsteps. He was this big, powerful man that everyone feared, and I wanted that… wanted to be just like him… wanted to fulfill my duties as the son of a cartel boss.”

“What changed that for you?”

“My mom overdosed, and my brother was murdered in the name of this glorified business. I decided that I didn’t want to glorify it anymore.” I stared out at the water as I spoke.

“You still benefit from being associated with the cartel, though. That ever makes you feel guilty… like you didn’t earn it cause you not living up to your part?”

I nodded my head. That was something that plagued me often. No matter how much I accomplished… how much I distanced myself from my family business, I would always be known as London’s son—heir to the London Cartel.

“Every damn day.”

“How do you find peace with that?” She turned her body toward me. The sun glistened in her brown eyes.

“I find my peace in knowing that every day I wake up, I’m living the life I chose and breaking the toxic cycle I don’t care to be a part of.”

“I’m never going back,” she mumbled to herself. It sounded as if she was trying to speak it into existence. She nodded her head as she returned her attention to the water. I touched her exposed thigh, and we sat there for a minute, watching the ocean. Deciding to free herself from the toxic cycle was huge. I wanted to find a way to reassure her that she had made the right choice.

“I was thinking…” I interrupted our silence. “We should celebrate your breakup and independence.”

“Celebrate?” she questioned. Her eyes said she wasn’t sure where I was going with this.

“Yeah, I want to plan something special for you.” She deserved it for all she had endured.

“Like a date?” Her voice rose an octave as the realization of what I was asking set in.

“No, like two friends celebrating one friend’s breakup from a lame ass nigga,” I replied, making her laugh and roll her eyes at the same time.

“A date.” She reiterated. I shrugged. It was a date, but my willingness to keep us platonic was strong.

“Whatever you want to call it, Monroe. Are you down?”

She turned her head away from me and tapped her pointer finger on her jaw as if she was in deep thought.

“Oh, you gotta think that damn hard?” I tossed a handful of sand at her. Monroe burst into laughter as she returned the sentiment. We stayed that way for a minute, tossing sand back and forth at each other like elementary school kids, sharing laughter.

“Okay, okay.” She held up her arms in surrender. “I would love to go on a date with you, London.”

“Be ready at six,” I informed her as I stood from the sand. I had a special night to plan for a special woman.

OceanofPDF.com

London

"What's the update?" I questioned Meechie as I waited for Monroe to come downstairs for our date. Meechie had eyes and ears on Monroe's dad, as well as Kashus, so we could stay one step ahead of them. I had a plan, but there were a lot of moving parts and things that needed to fall into place for it to go well.

"Nothing, nobody suspects anything yet. I had her security do a few check-ins from his phone. He has been telling whoever calls that she's not in the mood to talk since she's recovering from surgery. Anybody that would be concerned thinks she's sleeping and just doesn't want to be bothered or some shit."

I sighed in relief. Monroe's disappearance being undiscovered meant I didn't have to rush back to Miami and start damage control. I wanted to spend as much time with Monroe as possible. Being around her was peaceful as fuck, and I wanted that feeling for as long as I could have it.

"Perfect," I replied as I glanced at myself in the mirror. I wasn't a pretty nigga. I knew a nigga was handsome, and I knew how to dress, but this date with Monroe had me so nervous. I couldn't stop checking my appearance in the mirror.

"Everything good on your end, nigga? She good?" Meechie asked.

"Yeah, she is good. I took her by Aunt Vanessa's this morning." I waited to see what he was going to say. Like Aunt Vanessa had said earlier, I didn't bring women to meet her much. Cuba was my safe space, literally. This

villa had been meant to be my safe house. It was where I was supposed to disappear in case things ever went left. I never wanted to bring a woman here and risk my peace and safety. I wasn't an active member of the cartel anymore but that didn't mean I was free and clear. As London's son, I was still a target. Being born into the cartel was something that would haunt me forever. The decision to bring Monroe here wasn't made lightly. I trusted her, and it made sense to take her to my safe space so she could have safety.

"Oh shit, you took her to meet Auntie Nessa before she met me? Then Polo met her already, too. Nigga, I'm jealous!" Meechie shouted into the phone. I smirked as I made my way over to the couch and took a seat.

"You saw her in person already, nigga. Besides, you could have been the one to grab her."

"Nigga, I wasn't about to climb up out of my pussy to come kidnap yours. You crazy!" The phone was silent for a minute, and then we both broke into laughter.

"Sorry I took so long." Monroe's sweet voice cut through my laugh and invaded my ears. I damn near broke my neck turning around to see her as she strolled down the stairs. I stood from where I was sitting on the couch to greet her.

"*Damn!"* I mumbled under my breath. She hadn't disappointed. Monroe was beautiful. Her chocolate skin glowed in the orange dress that hugged every curve on her body.

"You look beautiful." I moved toward the end of the stairwell. I watched as her long legs descended every stair. When the time came, I would have her wrap them thick, chocolate motherfuckers around my neck again.

"I heard her, nigga. Let me see her!" Meechie yelled, reminding me he was on the phone. I was so fascinated by Monroe that I forgot all about his ass. Before I could tell Meechie to kick rocks, the phone rang for me to connect the video call.

"This nigga," I mumbled just as Monroe made it down the stairs.

"Chocolate, my best friend wants to meet you. You've seen him in the club, but he wants a formal introduction. That cool?"

Her eyes bounced around for a second before she finally spoke.

"Sure, answer it." She smiled. I nodded my head and swiped to answer the call. Without prompting, Meechie's loud ass voice came through the phone, followed by his face.

“I thought you were about to play me. Where is the girl that got us going through all this trouble?”

I didn’t respond. Instead, I flipped the phone to Monroe.

“Monroe, this my pain in the ass best friend, Demetrius. Everyone calls him Meechie.” I didn’t get a chance to introduce her because Meechie interrupted.

“The woman that needs no introduction. You have made quite the impression on my bro.”

“He’s made quite the impression on me,” Monroe countered. “Sorry for causing all this trouble.”

“I like trouble.” Meechie snickered, causing Monroe to laugh. “Snatching up a nigga chick is my specialty.”

I watched Monroe’s hand fly to her mouth.

“Meechie!” I brought the phone back to my face. “You got to excuse him; he lacks good sense,” I whispered to her.

“I got good sense, nigga!” Meechie blurted.

“You two are funny. Y’all have known each other for a long time?” she asked softly.

“Since diapers,” I replied.

“Yeah, so I’m telling you now, what you gon’ get if you get involved with this nigga. Automatic sister status.”

“Yes, sir,” Polo said. “I’ma sister your ass to death. Fair warning.” His face appeared on the screen. I should have known they were together. Those niggas were always together. Monroe didn’t say anything. She just stood there staring at the screen and giggling.

“Let us know if you have any problems out of that nigga,” Meechie interjected. I loved seeing her laughing, and I appreciated my friends for all they were doing for her. It showed my niggas had my back no matter what. I didn’t have to explain. If I needed them to, they were coming. This was a level of loyalty most people only dreamt of.

“I think I got it.” Monroe smiled.

“Aye, but check it, you got some friends that look like you?” Polo asked. I shook my head and turned the phone back on me.

“Y’all niggas done? We got plans.”

“Yeah, nigga. I’ll hit you if anything changes,” Meechie said before he hung up the phone.

Sliding my phone in my pocket, I said, “I apologize for them niggas. They don’t have good sense.”

“They seem like really good friends.” She giggled.

“They do?” I teased.

“Yes, nice. I wish I had someone in my corner like that.”

“You do,” I replied as I stared into her eyes. I could see our whole future together. It was crazy. Monroe was too damaged, though, and she needed to experience life on her own accord.

“Are you ready, beautiful?” I took her hand in mine.

“As ready as I’m going to be. I guess.” She fidgeted. She was nervous. I was too.

“Relax, Chocolate, we’re just two friends celebrating your freedom.” I grabbed her hand and escorted her down the path to the car that awaited us.

“We’re here.” I slid from the car and walked around to let her out.

“Where are we?” She grabbed onto my hand, allowing me to pull her out of the car.

“At our destination.” I shut the door behind her. The way she twisted her lips and pouted as we walked down the paved road made the anticipation of her reaction to what I had planned that much better.

“Oh my! This is definitely a date!” Monroe squealed as the candlelit beach came into view. I smirked as she dropped my hand and wandered joyously toward the ocean where the wooden raft I’d had decorated with flowers and candles awaited us. The sun was just beginning to dip below the horizon making the view beautiful just as I had planned.

“How’d I do?” I questioned, coming up behind her. The tears that rimmed her eyes told me I’d done good.

“This is beautiful… I don’t even have the words.” She looked between me and the raft.

“I’m glad you like it. After you, beautiful.” I extended my hand to help her on the raft.

“You sure this thing is fat people approved?” She hesitated. I didn’t like the dig she’d taken at herself.

“Chocolate, the only thing fat on you is that ass. I can see that motherfucker poking out of that dress.” I pulled her onto the raft slowly, making sure she got seated safely. The beautiful view of the sun setting over the horizon provided the perfect romantic atmosphere as our boatman pushed us into the lagoon.

“Would you believe I’ve never been on a boat before?” Monore’s voice sailed over the sound of the waves and the soft music playing in the background. I smirked.

“What else haven’t you done?” I wanted to know all the things she’d been deprived of so I could make them a reality. Her body language changed as she gazed out into the sunset.

“I’ve never roller skated or rode a roller coaster. I don’t know how to ride a bike, oh um… I’ve never had red fingernail polish.” She tapped her fingers on her chin as if she was thinking. “Ooh, I’ve never chewed bubble gum.”

“Hold up, you’ve never chewed bubble gum?” I slanted my head at her in confusion.

“My father said it was unladylike.” The more I heard about Monroe’s father, the more I wanted to ring his neck. Slowly, I reached over and placed my hand on her thigh. Her head turned toward me. The orange and red hues of the sunset radiated her skin and gave her brown eyes a beautiful glow.

“Those unladylike parts of you are the best parts.” I hoped my words landed somewhere in her spirit. She needed it. I removed the food from the basket. We both hadn’t eaten since breakfast, so I didn’t want to waste any time eating dinner. Aunt Vanessa had prepared dinner for us. I had no clue what she liked, so I had her cover a few bases.

“There's steak, shrimp, salad, and fried chicken.” I laid all the food on the small lap table that set in between us on the raft.

“This is a lot of food.”

“I ain’t know what type of girl you were when it came to your food.” I shrugged, making her laugh.

“The type that’s going to gain more weight if you keep feeding me like this. Lord knows I don’t need to gain any weight.”

She was taking another dig at herself. It pissed me off, but I understood it. Her ex-fiancé and father hadn’t exactly made her feel the best about her figure. It was going to take more than me complimenting her to erase the damage they’d done, but I was going to try.

“Make that the last time you negatively mention your weight or size. You are what you tell yourself you are.” I affirmed her.

Monroe dropped her head. “Bad habit, I guess.”

“Bad habits can be changed.” I reassured her.

She smiled, and we settled into a comfortable silence as we ate. It was the perfect vibe. Monroe was perfect. I didn’t care that she had a lot of healing to do. I wanted to be there with her through it all. Helping her heal, whether it was me she ended up with at the end of it all or not. Monroe deserved to find true happiness. The kind you couldn’t find being controlled by others. I stole glances at her as we ate. Seeing her so at peace was giving me peace. I was so caught up in admiring her that I almost forgot the other half of our date. Pushing my food to the side, I pulled another basket closer and removed its contents.

“Do you paint? I have wine.” I waved a small white canvas and bottle of wine in the air. Monroe gasped before removing her food from the small table.

“I love paint and wine!” she squealed.

“Great,” I said as I set the two canvases, paintbrushes, and paint on the table.

“What are we painting?” She looked around. We were in the middle of the ocean. The closest person to us was our boatman, but even he was in the distance waiting to come get us when we were done.

“I want you to capture the most beautiful things in life. The ones you’ve missed. Look around, Chocolate, there is art all around you.”

She nodded her head as she searched for something to paint.

“What are you going to paint?” she asked.

“The sunset. I do a lot of my dreaming watching the sun set.” I dipped my paintbrush in the red paint.

“Hmm, it’s almost impossible not to dream as you watch the sun set. I’ve spent a lot of evenings staring into the sky hoping for something different. Hoping my father was different. Hoping Kashus was different.” She paused. “I know what I’m going to paint.”

I looked up from the canvas.

“What?” I was curious.

“Me,” she said simply as she dipped her brush in the brown paint. We sat together, sipping wine and painting. I thought I had peace and happiness before, but it was nothing like this. Monroe was taking my shit to the next

level. It worried me a little because this whole thing was temporary. If I found peace in her what would become of me when she was gone?

The sun disappeared below the horizon, and we sat back and watched the stars come out. I wrapped my arms around her, and she melted into my body.

“I’ve never felt this safe with anyone before.” Her confession had me smiling.

“That’s what I’m here for, Chocolate. Just call me your bodyguard.” The unwavering urge I had to protect this woman from her past and whatever else she needed protecting from was crazy.

“You know what else I’ve never done?” She shifted her body, placing the paintings on the side to dry, then folded the small table. Without mumbling another word, she threw her leg over my lap and mounted me.

“What is that?” My voice was low with anticipation for what I knew was next. My dick was already at attention as she rolled her hips across my lap. We were treading a thin line and I needed to stop it, but I didn’t know if I could.

“I’ve never had sex in the middle of the ocean.” She fondled with my shorts, freeing my dick. Eating her pussy was one thing but having sex with her was going to unlock Pandora’s box. I didn’t know if she was ready for that.

“Hold on, Chocolate!” I was using every bit of restraint I had to stop her. “I ain’t trying to take advantage of you. I already crossed the line once.”

“London, I spent my entire life walking on eggshells and not being able to do what I want. You're not taking advantage of me. I want this.” She rolled her hips back and forth as she stroked my dick. “It’s so big and beautiful.” She moaned. The desperation in her voice mixed with the sensation of her hand moving up and down my dick was making it hard to resist her.

“Monroe.” I utilized my last ounce of restraint. If she didn’t heed to the warning this time, I was going to put us both out of our misery and fuck the shit out of her.

“Please, I want this more than I want anything else in this world.”

Her words killed my composure. I couldn’t fight her bad ass anymore. Cupping her ass cheeks, I lifted her and guided her back down onto my hard

dick. Her tight walls sucked me in like a vacuum as we let out a collaborative moan.

“The world is yours, Chocolate. Take what you need.” I breathed into her mouth as she rocked her thick ass back and forth in my lap.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

"The world is yours, Chocolate. Take what you need," London commanded as he pulled me down onto his penis. An immediate rush of pleasure coated my body. I bounced up and down, letting the euphoric feeling take over me… Freeing myself from all my inhabitations. Every label and box I'd had to live in, I was letting it all go on top of London's big, beautiful dick. I hadn't seen a lot of penises in my lifetime, but I'd seen enough to know his was immaculate. It was long, thick, and veiny, and it stretched and filled me to the brink of falling in love. My hips rolled, allowing my body to adjust to his size.

"Shhhit!" London moaned. He grabbed my ass and pushed into me with force.

"Oh my God!" A gasp escaped my lips as the waves crashed into the raft. My vision blurred. London thrusted into me harder and harder, digging into me with precision. "Ooh!" I cried out in pleasure.

"Let the world know how good this dick feels," London commanded.

I was at a loss for words as London dug his fingers into my ass cheeks and slammed me down on his dick. I threw my head back in enjoyment. I had never experienced anything like this before. London's dick was so deep inside me that it felt like he was hitting my heart.

"Oh fuck!" My moans were turning into pleasure filled cries.

"That's right, Monroe. Tell me!" He dove into me from the bottom. My eyes rolled to the back of my head, and another moan escaped my mouth.

“Oh!”

“Tell me again, Roe!” London moaned. It was his first time shortening my name, and I liked it. My mouth opened to tell him how much, but no words came out. Instead, my pussy juices gushed down his long shaft. His hand gripped my neck.

“This pussy is a fucking masterpiece.” He groaned.

My constant whimpers and screams blended with the sounds of the ocean.

“Anything you want in this world, I’m gon’ put it in your hands. You understand?”

His words took me over the edge. I could hear my juices raining down on him as I rolled my hips to match his strokes.

“Ooh… Dr. London! Dr. London!” I was happily unraveling.

“Anything you want in this world… I got you!” London shouted. His grip tightened on my neck, making my pussy throb around him. I was cumming, and it was beautiful.

“Fuck,” I moaned in a breathy drag. London’s dick was everything I thought it would be, everything I needed it to be in this moment.

“That’s right, take what you need. Wet yo’ dick!” he commanded. My body trembled uncomfortably as London’s grunts and thrusts increased. I was sure we were going to end up in the ocean at any minute from how hard the raft was rocking.

“My God!” I erupted on his dick.

“Not God, Roe, daddy!” He pulled me into him and connected my lips to his before trying to push me from his lap. He was about to release. I could feel him expanding inside of me. I loved it. I forced my body down and kept rocking my hips. This time his head fell back.

“I’m on birth control,” I moaned.

“Shit, Roe!” A breathy growl escaped his mouth as he sprayed his seeds all over my walls. There was no way this man didn’t have a slew of women lined up ready to fight me with the type of dick he was slanging.

“Damn, that was good.” I attempted to roll off him, but his hands gripped my ass cheeks and held me close.

“You remember what I told you, right?” He kissed my forehead.

“Yes.” I sank into his body. I figured he was referring to the promise he’d just made while he was snatching my soul from my body.

“Tell me what you want, beautiful,” he whispered. London was so sweet and gentle with me. It was such a contrast from the men I’d been around my entire life. If things continued this way, I didn’t think I could fight falling in love with him. I didn’t know if that was what he wanted. I was fresh out of an engagement and practically on the run from my father. Still, I leaned into him, looking up into his eyes.

“To feel protected and have a safe space to fall in love.” It was simple, yet I’d never been allowed either of those things. It was my deepest desire.

“I got you, Chocolate. Now come ride this dick again before we gotta get out of here.”

MY EYES FLUTTERED OPEN AS THE SUN FILTERED THROUGH THE CURTAINS, alerting me that it was morning. It took a minute for me to register where I was. The last thing I remembered was riding London into the night sky and feeling like I was floating on a cloud before passing out on his chest.

There was no recollection of arriving back to the villa or getting into bed. His good dick had indeed drained me and knocked me out cold. Rolling over, I stretched my arms and searched the room for London, hoping he’d decided to spend the night with me. The untouched side of the bed showed he hadn’t. I sighed and nuzzled my head into the pillow. Last night was beautiful. I’d never had a man put that much thought into taking me out and the dick was superb. It was a great start to my new life.

Groggily, I crawled out of bed and sauntered into the bathroom to relieve my bladder. I was eager to find Dr. London. I craved being in his space again. After emptying my bladder, I turned on the shower. No matter how eager I was to find him, I wasn’t going to go without taking care of my hygiene. I undressed and stepped into the walk-in shower. My body relaxed under the warm water. As I scrubbed my body clean, I thought about where my journey would lead me next.

I had no money, no place to stay, and no contact with the only two people in this world that I cared for. I couldn’t stay in this vacation home with London forever. I couldn’t hide from my father and Kashus forever. I eventually was going to have to figure my shit out. Still, with all the uncertainties of my life, I was happy. I welcomed the uncertainties. They

were a breath of fresh air from having everything planned for me all the time.

Turning off the water, I exited the shower. I didn't know what today had in store, so I decided to slip on a mute colored T-shirt dress and nude sandals. I gathered my natural curls into a messy bun atop my head and headed on the search for the man who was becoming my bodyguard. As I headed down the hallway to the guest room London had been sleeping in, the faint sound of birds chirping outside matched the rhythm of my heart. I was excited, probably a little too excited. Reaching his door, I lightly knocked.

"Good morning!" I shouted through the door. When no response came, I pushed the door open softly and peeked inside. It was empty, and the bed was made. Disappointment coursed through my body, and I turned on my heels to venture downstairs.

As I descended the staircase, the soft sound of music could be heard. A smile displayed on my face. I hoped the music led me to London. I stepped off the stairs and allowed the sounds of Bossman Dlow to guide me. It was coming from the back of the house behind the kitchen. Pushing the door open, I saw him, standing in what appeared to be a greenhouse. He was surrounded by a ton of plants. The leaves of the greenery seemed to glisten in the sunlight contrasting with London's dark skin.

I watched him for a moment, bopping around, singing Dlow's lyrics as he tended to one of the plants. Seeing him there, in his element, made me more drawn to him. The more I learned about him the more complex I realized he was.

"You garden?" I finally made my presence known as I stepped into the greenhouse. London turned to me and his eyes lit up.

"Good morning, Chocolate." He greeted as he turned the music off. I couldn't pull my eyes away from his shirtless body. His chiseled, tattooed chest had me in a trance. The man was fine and the plants around him only added to his aesthetic.

"Morning." I walked closer to him, taking in the beauty of the scenery around me. The glass room was filled with plants There had to be about fifty of them.

"You garden." I repeated it, and this time it came out as a statement and not a question. London picked up a plant, clipping the dead leaves from its pot.

“I’m a plant daddy. It’s a difference.” He smirked.

“Oh, is it?” Hearing him refer to himself as a plant daddy had me getting wet at the seat of my panties.

“It is.” He embraced me in a hug, fulfilling that urge I’d been on a search for. “How’d you sleep?”

“Good. I don’t even remember how we got back.”

“After you passed out on my dick, I had the boatman pick us up. I drove us back to the villa, undressed you, and put you in the bed.”

I giggled with embarrassment. I admitted, “I’ve never passed out like that before.”

“You never fucked me before, Chocolate.” He smirked as he let me go and returned his attention to his plants.

“I guess not,” I mumbled, glancing around.

“Tell me, Monroe, do you garden?”

“No, I kill every plant I touch.”

“Shh! Don’t say that out loud.” London took his hands up to one of his plants as if he were covering its ears. His gesture made me laugh as I looked around like the plants were about to beat my ass.

“Don’t worry. Daddy ain’t gon’ let her touch you,” he whispered to the tall leafy plant.

“You’re crazy.” I pressed a hand to my mouth to stifle my giggles. “It’s beautiful in here though, a little hot, but so peaceful.” I walked around, reading the labels on the pots as if I knew what they were.

“Thank you, Chocolate. It’s my safe space. Helps with lowering my anxiety.” He came up behind me. I could feel his body close to mine, but he stood at a respectful distance.

“Speak to it,” he commanded. I turned my head to glance at London before turning my head back to the beautiful green leaves of the plant. I’d heard of talking to flowers, but I’d never done it. I wasn’t a flowers and plants type of girl mainly because my daddy didn’t believe in buying them. As much money as he had, he saw them as a waste. Flowers die was his motto, and it became mine, too. I stared at the plant then back at London.

“What do I say?”

“Say hello.” He moved closer to my body. I took a deep breath. I didn’t know why I was so nervous about speaking to this plant, but I was.

“Hello,” I whispered. London reached around my body and picked up the plant.

“This one here is an African Iris. It’s always been my favorite. African Iris, meet Monroe Iris.” He introduced me to the plant as he moved it to another spot on the shelf.

“Did you know plants grow faster to the sound of a female voice? Just having you here gon’ have my plants bussing! I need to give this baby some room to grow.” He set the plant down. I swallowed hard at his words. He spoke as if I wasn’t a visitor—as if I wasn’t just passing by. I stood there for a minute watching as he added water to the African Iris.

“How’d you get into this?” I questioned. “Being a plant daddy and all? Who takes care of them when you're not here?” I was intrigued. There weren’t a lot of retired cartel bosses that were also a doctor and enjoyed gardening.

“Aunt Vanessa stops by, sometimes Alyza. I don’t know. I think it started when I was a kid, helping work on my family's coca farm. Somewhere down the line, I traded the coca plants for a simpler assortment.”

I shook my head. “A love for gardening that was fostered by growing cocaine plants, wow.”

“I’m a cartel baby.” He shrugged his shoulders. “What about you? What do you do for peace?”

It was a simple question, but I had to think about it. Before yesterday, I hadn’t had much peace. Each day with Kashus was spent dealing with drama and disappointment. He always had us wrapped in cheating scandals, or he was always complaining about something I did.

“I don’t know really.” I shrugged.

“You have to have something that brings you peace.”

“I read, I guess. I have… had a library.” It was the first time I’d missed something from back home. I dropped my head and tried to shield London from seeing my sadness. I didn’t want him to think I was ungrateful for all he’d done for me. As if he could read my mind, he grabbed my face and gazed intensely into my eyes.

“We can get you a library here for the time being. I’ll have some books brought over today.”

The ease of his willingness to make me happy was refreshing and scary at the same time. Dr. Royale London was too good to be true. He had to be. Looking away from him, I reminded myself of how temporary this arrangement was.

“Um, I’d been meaning to ask… How long will you allow me to stay here?”

“As long as you want,” he replied nonchalantly as he continued moving around his garden. “But at least until I can make sure you're safe. I’m going back to Miami tonight. I have some surgeries scheduled, and I plan to meet with your father, but you can consider this your home.”

I shook my head. Hearing that he would be meeting with my father allowed the reality of what I’d done to set in. There was no negotiating with my father. Once he found out what I’d done, I wouldn’t be safe here, and neither would London. My father would come looking for me and force me right back into my marriage with Kashus. My head was spinning. When Kashus found out I’d let another man have me sexually, he’d probably kill me. My thoughts raced as everything hit me at once.

“London, I… I… Meeting with my father is a bad idea. He doesn’t negotiate well… and then there’s Kashus. He’s going to come in guns blazing. It may be best that you distance yourself from me. I can be gone in a few days.” I started pacing the floor.

“Too late. I’m already involved, and you not going anywhere until I assure your safety.”

“You don’t understand. Me leaving Kashus and being here with you… If they found out you helped me leave, they’re going to try and kill you. You can’t walk into that meeting.” London grabbed me, bringing me into his body.

“You think I would have taken you if I didn’t know the risks? I’m a doctor, but I’m not some weak ass nigga. An active member of the cartel or not, killing me would incite a war your father is not strong enough for. Besides, it’s gon’ take a lot for a motherfucker to kill me. Do you understand?” His voice was bolstering and soothing at the same time. “I asked you if you wanted out. I’m going to get you out… for good!”

“How?” I asked softly, pulling up from his chest. “How are you going to do that?”

“Don’t worry about how. I got you. Now come here. I want to show you something.”

He kissed my forehead then my lips before leading me over to the back corner of the room. Confusion covered my face as I watched him push a table over to the side. When he was done, he patted the floorboards. Suddenly, the floor moved to reveal a hole. My eyes bulged.

“My father gifted me this house because it was meant to be my safe house. My way to evacuate if shit went left. This house is equipped with several safe rooms, but this one is the only one that has a tunnel.” He stared at the hole in the floor. “If you’re ever in trouble, this is where you hide. Follow the tunnel to the end. It leads to the main road. Do you understand?”

I nodded. My heart beat at what he had chosen to share with me. London tapped the floorboards, and they closed again. He scooted the shelf back into place.

“Why are you doing this?” I questioned. I was a stranger, yet he was sharing his world with me. His safety. His peace. It was insane, yet I appreciated it all.

“To be honest, my intention when I first walked into my office and saw you was to make you mine, but I’ve discovered that you need more than another man in your life forcing something on you. You’re like me, wanting to create something different for your family. If I can give that to you, then that’s good enough for me.”

My heart swelled and I connected my lips to his.

“You can still make me yours.” I rubbed my hands down his chest. I was sure I sounded crazy, but I didn’t care. In two days, this man had shown me enough to know I didn’t want to be without him. He pushed me away.

“No, I can’t. You have so much healing to do, Monroe. So much to discover about yourself.”

“Heal me then… discover it with me,” I whispered, moving closer to him.

OceanofPDF.com

London

Monroe was testing me for the second time in less than twenty-four hours. I didn't want to keep giving in to her, but it felt right. She knew I was attracted to her, and she was playing on that shit. She had this crazy idea that she could free herself on my dick, and the more I fought her, the more persistent she was. Her hand wandered down my chest and into my shorts.

"Heal me." Her voice was dripping with need. It had my dick standing at attention remembering how good she'd felt last night. I wanted her, but the more we connected our souls the harder it would be for both of us when it was time to part ways.

"Monroe," I called, grabbing her hand to try and stop her. I wanted to show her around the neighborhood a little more and prepare her for my return to Miami. I had no plans to dig her guts out today.

"One for the road." She dropped to her knees.

"Monroe, get up." I tried to pull her up, but all my restraint vacated when she popped my dick out of my shorts and slathered it with spit. I was gone for this woman, and it was no use in trying to fight it.

"Shit!"

She wrapped her soft hands around my shaft and began stroking as she took me into her mouth.

"Damn." She had me moaning like a bitch as I fought through my foggy vision to look at her. Monroe had a vacuum as a mouth. It was the perfect

mixture of warmth, wetness, and pressure.

“Mm,” she moaned on my dick as she looked up at me.

“Take this shit off.” I leaned over and tugged at her dress. I wanted to see all of her. She pulled my dick out of her mouth just long enough to slip her dress over her head. She was nearly naked underneath except for the brown lace bra she wore.

“Fucking perfect!” I complimented as she shoved my dick back down her throat. “Fuck, Chocolate. Suck that shit.”

I balanced my body up against the ledge of a shelf to stop from falling. Monroe was sucking my soul out of my body. Her mouth was latched perfectly around my dick as her eyes pierced up at me, telling me a million things that she needed. It was sending shivers down my spine.

“Just like that.” I relaxed my hand on the back of her head, palming her messy curls as she slurped on my dick. She was sucking and licking me with so much precision I wanted to show up at Kashus’s doorstep and put a bullet in his ass for playing with her. The thought that he had experienced this and still fucked around on her pissed me off.

“You look so fucking beautiful eating this dick. Don’t stop!” My head fell back, and I released a series of grunts. I was on the verge of spilling my seeds down her throat. I wasn’t ready for that, though. My dick was rock hard, and I needed to be inside her. Pulling her up, I wrapped her legs around my waist and carried her over to an empty wall. I could tell she was shocked at how I lifted her with ease. Monroe’s weight was nothing to me. She was probably two hundred something pounds, but I bench pressed more than that. I wasted no time positioning myself at her entrance. I breached her walls slowly and they welcomed me like a long-lost friend, suctioning me in.

“Damn, Chocolate.” I grunted. Monroe had to be a Dotson vacuum cleaner in her past life with the way her mouth and pussy had gripped me.

“Damn.” I growled again, finding a steady pace inside of her. My hands gripped her ass cheeks as I rammed into her. This shit felt better than any pussy I’d ever known. I gripped the sides of her waist to deepen my thrusts. Last night, I took it easy on her. I ain’t want us to end up in the middle of the ocean, but today I was going to give her just what she wanted.

“Oh… my… fuck!” She moaned. Her pussy was soaking wet, making it easy for me to slide in and out of her insides. I’d never felt anything so good.

“Heal me! Heal me!” A pleasurable cry escaped her mouth as I pounded into her. I followed her request as I plowed into her harder and faster, trying to mend her broken pieces with my dick.

“Ohhhh!” she screamed. Her pussy was squeezing me so tight I knew I wouldn’t last much longer, but I wasn’t going to stop until her sweet shit rained down on me.

“Heal me!” she exclaimed again as I bounced her in the air on my dick.

“Tell me you're beautiful!” I dug my hands into her ass cheeks.

“I’m beautiful!”

“Tell me you're enough!” I brought her body into mine. She wrapped her hands around my neck as I continued my healing assault on her pussy.

“I’m enough! I’m enough!”

“Tell me you're worthy of love.” I growled in her ear while thrusting feverishly inside of her. I could feel her tight walls contracting around my dick. She was on the verge of cumming.

“I’m worthy of love!” she screamed as she exploded on my dick. I gripped her tighter, never stopping my thrusts. I wasn’t done affirming her. If Monroe wanted to find her healing on my dick, then that’s exactly what she was going to get.

“Tell me you trust yourself.”

“Yes… Oh my God! I’m cumming!” Her body was shaking from the impact of her orgasm. I held her in place, pounding inside of her.

“Tell me, Monroe! I want to fucking hear that shit!”

“I trust myself!” The impact from her orgasm pushed me out of her insides and her sweet juices shot into the air.

“Damn!” I watched her juices spray me and the plants that were next to us before plunging back into her. My strokes were long and hard. I was about to nut.

“Oh my God! You’re fucking me… so good!” she moaned. That was it, her sweet voice was the last straw I needed to send me overboard. I erupted and coated her walls without any care. She said she was on birth control, and normally, I verified that shit for myself, but at this moment, I didn’t give a fuck. I stayed inside her for a minute. I couldn’t move. I needed a moment to catch my breath and my composure.

“You’re fucking beautiful, Monroe.” I connected my lips to hers. Her eyes were closing as if she was trying to fall asleep.

“We don’t have time for a nap, Chocolate!” I lowered her down to the floor, making sure she was steady on her feet before shedding my shorts. They’d gotten wet from Monroe’s squirting session. Grabbing them off the floor, I moved to the door.

“Come on so I can feed you,” I instructed. Monroe stood there with her arms wrapped around her partially naked body. I stared at her for a moment before it hit me. She wasn’t comfortable in her skin. Walking back over to her, I grabbed her by the hand.

“It’s only us here, and I’ve already seen all your flaws. They’re beautiful. Let’s go eat!”

She hesitated for a moment before dropping her other hand and nodding.

“Let’s go eat.” She allowed me to lead her out of the greenhouse and into the kitchen.

“Aunt V brought over lunch. I had her put it in the microwave,” I said as I led her over to the counter to have a seat before walking to the microwave.

“We’re going to eat naked?” she questioned.

“Yeah, we can get dressed later.” I shrugged my shoulders and removed the two plates of food from the microwave. Luckily, they were still warm.

“I’m very comfortable being naked, Monroe.” I set the food down in front of her and took my seat.

“I am too… when I’m alone.” She moved around on the chair uncomfortably.

“Then pretend you’re alone.” I bit into my food. She looked like she was about to say something else, but the blaring sound of my phone ringing from the greenhouse stopped her.

“I’ll be right back,” I told her as I removed myself from the table and headed back into the greenhouse. My phone stopped ringing just as I reached the door but started right back up again. It had to be urgent if someone was calling repeatedly. Finally reaching my phone, I glanced at the caller. It was Meechie. I swiped the screen to answer the call.

“Yeah, bro?”

“I hope you on your way back to Miami.” I could tell by his voice that something was up.

“What’s wrong, nigga?”

“Kashus wants his fiancée back. He’s put an APB out on her in the streets. I don’t think he’s alerted Mr. Iris yet.”

“Good; let him scramble.”

“You want me to set up the meeting with Mr. Iris?”

I shook my head. “Naw! I haven’t told her about getting married, yet.” My eyes shot to the door. Everything was falling into place perfectly. As I predicted, Kashus wouldn’t go straight to Monroe’s dad because he didn’t want to risk looking incapable of taking care of her. It gave me just enough time to swing in and be the hero. All I had to do now was get Monroe on board with the rest of the plan. That was the complicated part. I didn’t want to be another man in her life that was forcing something on her or telling her what to do. I already cared too much about her for that.

“Fuck, nigga! You may not have that much time. What are you waiting on?” Meechie was stressed. I could hear it in his voice. I was changing the plan, and he knew me well enough to know when I was changing my mind.

“I can’t force another marriage on her, Meechie. I gotta come up with another way.” I rubbed my hand across my forehead.

“If you don’t marry her, the only other way is to dry up their pockets, and that may get bloody.” Meechie chortled. I thought about what he’d said. The original plan was to marry Monroe to save her from having to marry Kashus. Her father couldn’t marry her off if she was already married. Just having the London last name would allow her a certain level of protection. We would only need to be married on paper, and she would be free. It was the perfect plan, but the more I got to know her, the worse I felt about forcing her into another marriage—on paper or not.

“Let’s try to avoid the blood bath. I ain’t tryna get into the field. I’ll be back within the next few hours. Set up the meeting.”

“And say what when we get there?” Meechie shot back. It was a valid question. One I had no real answer to, but I would figure it out before then.

“Say I’m your wife,” Monroe blurted, causing me to turn around. She was standing in the doorway with her naked body glistening in the sun. I raised my eyebrows in confusion and intrigue. She’d heard me. I stared into her eyes, searching for her certainty.

“You heard me?”

She nodded, stepping into the greenhouse.

“My father only wants me to marry Kashus for his connections. If I'm already married, there’s nothing he can do about it. Besides, the London

name holds more weight than the Grants. He'll be pissed at first, but he won't rip me away from you to put me back with Kashus."

I stared at her for a moment, intrigued that she was willing to go through with it, but I wouldn't let her. I couldn't.

"You don't have to marry me, Monroe. We'll get another plan."

"This is the best plan," she replied.

"She's right," Meechie agreed, interrupting the stare I had on Monroe.

"You sure you want to do this? We'll just be married on paper, but you'll still be running from one marriage to another one." I neared her, wanting to make sure she was aware of everything she'd be getting herself into. Monroe's eyes lit up, and a confidence I hadn't seen in her shined through them.

"Yeah, that may be true… but with this one, marrying you is my choice. I don't feel forced, and it'll only be on paper, right?"

"Only on paper," I confirmed. "After we're done with all of this, you'll be free to go. No more arrangements."

Monroe and I stared at one another for a moment. Even if temporary, this was a big step—a risky one. We'd already slept together twice, and I didn't want Monroe to get confused on what this whole thing was about.

"Do we get to have a wedding?" she questioned, making me smirk at the way her face lit up.

"Whatever you want, remember?" I reminded her of what I'd told her last night.

She suggested, "A small ceremony on the beach."

"A small ceremony on the beach it is." I held up my hands in surrender. "Anything else?"

"One more thing." She held up her pointer finger.

"Yes?" I asked intrigued.

"I need someone to walk me down the aisle." She giggled.

"I got you!" Meechie's voice thundered through the phone. "Just tell us what to wear and me and Polo are there!" he shouted, making Monroe burst into laughter.

"It's settled then. I guess we're getting married tonight." Monroe wrapped her arms around my body. I pushed her back, handing her the phone before running out of the greenhouse. When Meechie and I concocted this plan, I ran out and brought Monroe a ring. If I was going to ask her to marry me, fake or not, I was going to come correct. Grabbing the

black box out of the hallway closet, I ran back to Monroe. She was still standing there in all her naked glory talking to Meechie.

“I need to do this shit right.” I moved to her and lowered myself to the ground on one knee. “There was no way I was doing this without a ring.” I took her soft hand in mine. “Monroe Iris, will you be my wife?” I opened the black box. Tears rimmed in her eyes like we had been dating for many years.

“Yes!” She nodded her head in excitement.

“Then I guess we’re getting married, Chocolate.” I slid the ring on her finger then quickly found her lips. “You look so beautiful wearing nothing but my ring.” It had my dick rising again.

“I do, huh?” She held up her left hand, admiring the diamond. Her smile was priceless.

“Hell yeah.” I lifted her up. “Let me tell that pussy how good she look wearing my ring.”

Monroe giggled as she wrapped her legs around my neck and used her ringed hand to push my head into her center.

“Man, y’all nasty. I’ll see y’all in about an hour.” Meechie hung up the phone and Monroe let it drop on a nearby table.

“Heal me with yo’ mouth, future husband.”

“Say less, Chocolate,” I mumbled before latching on to her pretty swollen clit.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

I waited behind the makeshift doors at the end of the aisle. My heart beat fast with excitement. The weight of what I was about to do, get married only six hours after saying yes, played heavily in my brain. There were so many things that could go wrong. London could turn out to be worse than Kashus, but I was willing to take the risk. A lifetime of being tied to Kashus Grant was like a death sentence. The fact that London had bought me an engagement ring made my heart swell. It was so thoughtful and only confirmed that he was a rare breed. I only hoped he didn't change up me.

Aunt Vanessa greeted me behind the doors. "It's almost showtime." She'd been a Godsend getting me ready for this last-minute wedding. Five hours ago, she showed up at London's villa with a full glam squad and her mother's old wedding dress. Luckily for me, London's grandmother had been pregnant when she married. It took a few alterations, but the dress eventually fit me perfectly. The trumpet style white dress flowed over my curves perfectly, making me feel like a goddess.

"Mama's dress looks beautiful on you, Monroe." Aunt Vanessa snapped a picture. I smiled as I slipped my hands down my body trying to calm my nerves. "It's natural to be nervous, sweetheart." She tucked one of my loose curls out of my face. "My nephew is a good man. I trust he'll do right by you." She reassured me. She knew why we were getting married, and she was still offering us her full support. It was a breath of fresh air from what I was used to.

“You deserve happiness, Monroe.” She stared into my eyes. I welcomed her words. Taking a deep breath, I reminded myself of how powerful this moment was. This was not the marriage that my father had arranged for me, but the one that I had chosen for myself. That was what made this special.

“Your future husband sends you a gift.” Alyza came from around the doors, holding a phone. “It’s yours. I can give you the phone number later.”

“London bought me a phone?” I stared at the empty screen confusingly before a familiar face appeared.

“Contessa?” I questioned in disbelief. Tears instantly pooled in my eyes. I had missed her. This was probably the longest I’d gone without talking to her since she’d become a part of my family.

“Yes, ma’am!” Her voice illuminated through the phone.

“Tessa!” I shouted again. Excitement dripped from my voice.

“Royale said to keep it short,” Alyza whispered. I nodded, taking the phone from her hand and walking a few feet away.

“I’m getting married!” I announced. “I ran away, Tessa. I don’t want to be stuck in a loveless marriage with Kashus.” I confessed all at once. An instant wave of relief washed over me.

“I know,” she replied.

“You know?” I wondered how much she was privy to. I know I’d asked London if he could send a message to her, but I never confirmed if he had.

“Yes, you got a lot of explaining to do, heffa, but I won't ask you to do it on your wedding day. Hold the phone back. Let me see you.”

I did as she asked, pulling the phone back so I could show off my dress. There was so much I wanted to say to her—so many things to catch her up on.

“Monroe, oh my God! You look gorgeous!” she squealed into the phone, causing me to smile.

“Thank you,” I replied.

“How are you? How’s the baby?” I questioned.

“We’re fine!” She pulled the phone back so I could see her growing belly bump. I smiled. We stared at each other off and on, settling into an awkward silence… both of us avoiding the elephant in the room.

“Are you safe?” Tessa broke the silence. A look of concern plastered across her beautiful face.

“I’m okay, Tessa. I’m the safest I’ve been my entire life,” I told her. Contessa’s face immediately relaxed.

“Good.” She smiled. She was happy for me but was worried about my safety. Contessa understood the gravity of what I was doing. Defying family tradition, it was dangerous, and neither of us knew the outcome.

“How long do I have to keep this a secret from your father?”

“I’m not sure.” I shrugged.

“Dr. London is something. He tried to fly me out there this evening. I thought I was going to have to show him orders from the doctor that I couldn’t travel this late in the pregnancy.”

I giggled at her mentioning London. “He’s the most unselfish man I ever met.”

“He has you smiling. I’ve never seen you smile that damn hard.”

I couldn’t even hide the grin that was plastered on my face. London did make me smile.

“Which is saying a lot considering the circumstances, this decision is abrupt but—”

“It’s your choice. I get it.” Tessa cut me off, and we shared another knowing silence.

“I wish you were here, Tessa.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be watching from my phone.”

“Times up! We gotta start soon, or we’ll miss the sunset.” Alyza walked up behind me.

“I love you!” Tessa screamed as I handed Alyza the phone.

“I love you, too!” I shouted back.

“I’ll hold this during the ceremony.” Alyza took the phone and headed to take her seat. A rush of emotions flooded me. The amount of effort London had put into making this day special was so heartwarming. Contessa was my only friend in the world. Having her here if only by phone meant a lot to me. I returned to my spot behind the doors and waited for my cue, taking in the moment and allowing the gentle rustling of the palm trees to calm me. Suddenly, a sense of peace washed over me, and I felt at peace with my decision.

“You ready?” Meechie grabbed ahold of my arm.

“She better be, and we don’ flew all the way out here.” Polo walked up on us and latched onto my other arm.

“As ready as I can be. Thank you, guys, for doing this,” I replied.

“That nigga behind these doors is my brother. We have been locked in since we were lil pee pee diaper wearing niggas. He asks me for something,

anything, I'm pulling up. He asks me to go to war behind a girl he's feeling, and I walk her down the aisle. We family now, mamas. That's that!" Meechie confessed, causing butterflies to flutter in my chest.

The love and loyalty he had for London was something I'd always longed for. It was beautiful. There was nothing I could say back that would suffice, so I just nodded. The music began, and I knew that meant the wedding would soon begin. I took a deep breath, and on cue, the doors parted. London came into view at the end of the aisle. My feet began to move, and our eyes locked on each other. The tears that gathered in the rims of his eyes were that of a man marrying the love of his life. I sailed to the aisle. My feet sank into the sand, feeling like I was in a dream, but this was real life—my life. As we neared the end of the aisle, London moved to me, taking me by the hand.

"We supposed to give her to you, nigga, back up." Meechie chuckled, causing me to giggle.

"I don't follow directions," London replied as he gently yanked me away from Meechie and Polo.

"You look gorgeous." He guided me underneath the beautifully decorated white arch. I looked back at my aisle escorts and thanked them quietly as they took their seats in the audience. It was a small crowd that consisted of Aunt Vanessa, Alyza, Polo, Meechie, and Contessa was propped up in a chair on the video call.

"We are here to unite you two beautiful people in marriage," the officiant announced, causing me to turn my attention back to London. "Today, the two of you become a little more than you were before. In the eyes of the law, you'll be husband and wife."

I stared at London nervously. My body trembled.

"Look to one another and remember what brought you here. Your love, yes, but also all the decisions you have made to keep your relationship growing. Remember that you are both deserving of love and worth the effort that goes into loving each other."

My eyes bounced from the officiant to London. My heart pounded out of my chest.

"Now turn to each other," he instructed. London took my hands in his.

"Do you, Monroe Iris and Royale London, desire to be marriage partners?" We shared a giggle as London and I both nodded at the same

time. “Do you promise to make every effort to share your love and respect for each other from this day on?”

“I do,” London said without any hesitation.

“I do,” I replied.

“Rings, please,” he requested. Polo handed the officiant the rings. “Who wants to go first?”

“I will,” I responded. He handed me the ring Alyza had helped me pick out at a small jewelry store in the market. I spent the last money I’d had on it, and it was worth it. The look of surprise on his face as I slid the ring onto his finger was priceless.

“As you place the ring on Royale’s finger, please repeat after me,” the officiant instructed.

“I, Monroe, take you, Royale, to be my husband. I want us to create our life together with honesty and compassion, from this day forward.”

I repeated each word. My heart beat fast as I slid the ring completely on his finger. London mouthed thank you as the officiant handed him my ring and began reciting his vows. The moment London opened his hand and revealed the beautiful, diamond studded band I nearly fainted. I wasn’t expecting something this fancy. He had already gone all out on the ring. My eyes filled and tears that had been pooling finally released. London grabbed my left hand and slid the ring on my finger.

“I, Royale, take you to be my wife. I want us to create our life together with honesty and compassion, from this day forward.”

My heart beat so heavily as he recited his wows to me that I was sure London could hear it. I looked into his eyes, feeling the strength and support that he provided radiate through me.

“It is my pleasure to pronounce you man and wife. You're officially married and may seal your union with a kiss.”

London wasted no time pulling me close and planting his lips onto mine. Cheers and claps rang out, but we were in our own little world. As our tongues swirled, I found it harder and harder to accept this marriage was to be only on paper. It felt as if I had just married the love of my life.

OceanofPDF.com

London

"I just made it home, Chocolate," I informed Monroe as I pressed the key fob up against my door. I'd been on the phone with her since I'd left Havana. After we tied the knot and mingled with family, I hopped on the private jet. I had to be in the office in a couple of hours. Monroe was hesitant about staying in Cuba alone, but it was the only way I could ensure she was safe. I needed to keep Monroe hidden until after I met with her father and our union was legalized. I couldn't risk Kashus or Jacob snatching her up and forcing her back into her old life. That shit was over and done with.

"Connect the video; I want to see your home." Monroe yawned into the phone. I swiped the screen to answer the call. Her beautiful bare face came into view. She was lying in the bed, teetering the lines of sleep and awake.

"This is my living room." I turned the screen so she could see as I moved through the house.

"Nice." She smiled. I put my things down on the kitchen table and ventured further down the long hallway to my bedroom, showing Monroe a few things along the way. Today had been eventful, and the only thing I wanted to do was crash on my bed and talk to Monroe until sleep found me. Something was happening between us, and I was losing the war of trying to stop it. Entering my bedroom, I froze in my tracks as Briana's naked ass sprawled across my bed spread eagle came into view.

“Fuck!” I grunted, moving quickly to turn the camera. Even if our marriage was fake, I ain’t want Monroe seeing a naked woman with her legs gapped wide open on my bed. I owed her more respect than that. Swiping at the screen, I disconnected the call. I could explain that later. Briana’s naked ass lying in my bed not so much. I sighed as I wiped my hands across my face. Briana being here for our weekly appointment had completely slipped my mind. Shit, the only things on my mind were work and Monroe.

“Hey, daddy!” Briana giggled seductively. My head shook in disbelief. Usually, this was just what I needed after a long day of work, but today wasn’t a long day of work. Today was the day I’d gotten married. The only woman’s pussy I wanted to see was Monroe’s. I cut my eyes away from Briana, trying to find the words to let her down nicely.

“Aye, Bri, this not a good time,” I said as I walked past her into my closet. I needed to find some clothes for her so I could send her on her way and call my wife back.

“You good, daddy?” Briana snuck up behind me and wrapped her hands around my waist. Everything about her oozed sex appeal. It was leaking from her pores. The sight of Bri usually turned me on, but I wasn’t the slightest bit aroused.

“I’m good, just tired from traveling.” I pushed Briana’s hands from around my waist. “Raincheck?”

“Come on, daddy. I miss you. She been thinking about you all day.” Briana dropped to her knees. I had to stop her. If I allowed her to touch my dick, he’d probably wake up, but it just didn’t feel right. Even though I wasn’t sleeping with Briana, it felt like cheating. I couldn’t do it.

“Not tonight, Bri. I just want to rest.” I threw the T-shirt on the ground and stepped around her, leaving her there on her knees. My phone rang, and Monroe’s name flashed across the screen. I allowed it to ring and go straight to voicemail. I’d call her back as soon as I got Briana to leave.

“Who is she?” Briana joined me in my bedroom. “That’s why you are acting strange, right? I see the ring. It’s never been there before.”

I sighed. Briana and I had never been on that type of time, so I didn’t feel a way about telling her about Monroe.

“I got married today.” I came straight out and told her. Briana’s mouth dropped in surprise.

“Married, and you came here to me?”

“It’s complicated, but she is the only woman on my mind right now and probably for the near future.”

Briana stood from the bed and proceeded to get dressed.

“Whoever she is, she’s a lucky girl. I’d fight her about that dick, but I don’t think I stand a chance with you on that level.” Briana laughed, causing me smirk. Nobody stood a chance next to Monroe, and I was glad she was being an adult about the situation. I looked away as Briana dressed. My fingers itched to call Monroe back.

“I wish you and the wife the best. Walk me out?”

I stood from the bed and followed her to the front door, admiring the work I’d done on her ass along the way. *I’m good as fuck at what I do.*

“If y’all ever on a break, hit me up.” She opened the door and sashayed out.

“Be easy, beautiful,” was all I could offer her as I closed the door behind her. I didn’t waste any time changing the lock code on my door. I didn’t want any more surprise pop ups.

I walked back to my bedroom and called Monroe back as I undressed.

“London. Oh my God, you scared me.”

My heart sank at the thought of Monroe being worried about me. I never wanted her to be worried about anything anymore.

“I’m good, Chocolate. My calls drop in here sometimes.” I lied for probably the first time in my life. I ain’t know if Monroe could handle the truth. Telling the truth would only give her a reason to doubt me and herself. We were in a good place, and I ain’t want to fuck that up.

“Was that before or after you put your little friend out?” She quipped. My eyes bulged, and my chest began to hurt. My first lie, and she caught me.

“What?”

“I saw her.” She confirmed my thoughts.

“Fuck, Monroe, I can explain…”

“Don’t. This thing between us isn’t real, London. I’m not really your wife. You’re free to fuck who you want.”

“I am fucking who I want, Monroe.”

“No, it’s getting late. Goodnight, Royale.” She hung up.

“Fuck!” I yelled as I dialed her back. She let me go straight to voicemail the first time and then she answered and hung up the second. This thing between us was supposed to be about her freedom and her freedom only,

but we'd already blurred the lines. I should have just left it alone, but I knew allowing her to sit in her thoughts would only make shit worse. Opening the security app on my phone, I quickly swiped to my safe house bedroom. Monroe was lying on the bed with her face in her hands. The realization that she was crying fucked me up. Pressing the speaker, I called her name.

"Monroe!" Her head darted up, and her eyes roamed the room. "I'm sorry, Chocolate. I'm sorry. I'm not a liar, but I lied. I ain't want you to be doing what you doing right now." I sighed before continuing. "I could say I didn't know she was gon' be here, but I did. Bri and I used to have a weekly meet up. With everything going on, I just forget to tell her ass not to show up."

Monroe looked around the room. Her head rose and fell again. Her mouth opened and closed.

"The apology isn't needed. We're not really married, Royale. This is business, right? You can do what you want. I hope you didn't put her out on the account of me."

That was the second time she'd called me by my name, and it was bothering me. I was London to her, and that's how I liked it.

"Monroe!" I called her name.

"Leave me alone, London." She covered her ears.

"Nah!" I yelled back. "Answer the phone, so we can talk this out like adults." I dialed her number again. This time, her soft voice glided through the phone.

"Yes, Royale?"

"Aye, stop calling me that," I warned. She didn't say anything. Her breathing was the only way for me to know she was still on the phone.

"Ask what's making you feel uncomfortable," I instructed. We might as well get it all out in the open.

"Who is she?"

"Her name's Briana. She was a friend."

"And you have sex with her?"

"I used to. Last Thursday was the last time," I answered honestly.

"Why'd you lie?"

"I lied to protect your feelings. I should have just been truthful about it."

Monroe sighed on the other end of the phone.

“You were right; we shouldn’t have had sex. I don’t think I can handle the thought of you fucking another woman.”

I pushed the button, hoping she’d connect the video so I could see the jealousy etching across her beautiful face. She appeared on screen, and I cringed at her puffy eyes. I never wanted to see her cry or have to be jealous ever again. If I had it my way, Monroe would be mine, we’d ride off in the sunset, but that wasn’t what she needed.

“I don’t want to fuck other women, Monroe; that’s the fucked-up part,” I admitted.

“Why is it fucked up?” Her eyes held my gaze through the phone.

“Because you deserve freedom, not to be locked down in a relationship, and every time I look at you, that’s what I want to do. Make this marriage more than just an on-paper situation.”

“Why can’t I have both? My freedom and you?”

Her question was simple, but I ain’t have an answer for her. It had only been two days since we’d met. We shouldn’t be having this conversation. The feelings we felt for each other we shouldn’t be feeling, but we were.

“Maybe you can, Chocolate.” I sighed. “But let’s start with your freedom first.”

The line fell quiet, and her head dropped. Monroe was special. I knew that, but she didn’t and that was the problem.

"You need to get the experience of being alone—eating alone, sleeping alone, dating yourself. Making your own choices. Those are the only things that will allow you to grow, Chocolate.” I checked the screen to gauge if she was actively listening. I needed her to be listening because I needed her to do the things I was speaking of. Her eyes were back on mine, holding my gaze, so I continued. “You need time to learn yourself, to learn what inspires you, to learn your hopes and dreams, to figure out your boundaries.” I paused, trying to figure out the right words for the last thing I wanted to say.

“Monroe, baby, when you do all that and when you’re healed, you better believe I’ma be there with open arms, waiting for you to choose a nigga. Not because I’m the only nigga that’s ever treated you like you deserve or because I be digging yo’ fucking guts out, but choose me because you know who the fuck Monroe is and how I fit into your life.” I could hear her breathing get heavy. I hoped she was taking in everything that I had said because I meant every fucking word. I couldn’t make it blunter than this.

“I don’t know who Monroe is,” she mumbled as if the discovery was new to her.

“And it’s not your fault.” She’d been born into a family that dealt her cards. “Make me a promise, Chocolate. Promise me you’ll focus on getting to know who you are. Promise me you’ll heal,” I demanded. She stared at me with tears welling up in her eyes.

“I promise,” she whispered into the phone. I could hear the reluctance in her voice.

“Good, now let’s get some rest.” I climbed my unclothed body into the bed and nestled my phone onto the pillow next to me. We didn’t need to say anything further, and soon, Monroe’s light snores filled the air, offering me the perfect background noise to doze off.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

“Tell me again what the bitch had on!” Tessa squealed into the phone. This was my second time giving Tessa the rundown on what had happened a few nights ago, and it felt good to be able to vent to her. London had gotten me a new phone that blocked my location and wasn’t trackable, making it okay for me to talk to Tessa. I was glad too because not talking to her for the last couple of days had been hard.

“Girl, nothing, the bitch was naked!” I shouted. My blood boiled again at the thought of seeing the naked woman sprawled across London’s bed. At first, I wasn’t sure what I’d seen. I thought my eyes had been deceiving me, but when London hung up and kept rejecting my calls, I knew what I’d seen was real. The scene had bothered me more than it should, but it made me realize that I was getting too wrapped up in London. He was helping me regain my life, and that was supposed to be it.

“Well, you had to know a man that damn fine had hos.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t expect to see her legs agape on his bed the night of our wedding.”

Tessa laughed, but I didn’t see anything funny. The whole thing had rocked me to my core. “It just reminded me why I need to chill on him. He’s been preaching that I needed to heal, and I’ve been the one pressing him for more.”

“I bet you have. The man is fine and seems damn near perfect.”

“He is perfect. He didn’t gaslight me about the situation. He apologized, answered my questions, affirmed me, and reassured me that I had a special place in his life. He’s so different, Tessa, except for the whole being a ho part.” My thoughts traveled back to last night and how London had spoken life into me. It was beautiful, and it filled my heart in a place that had been empty for so long.

“Stop, he’s not a ho; he’s single. You said he put her out, right?”

“Yes.”

“And he told you the truth?”

“Yes, Tessa, the man basically told me he would wait for me to heal. He told me to go out into the world and live life, and when I come back, he’ll be waiting.”

“Girl, that is beautiful. You’re living a true fairytale. I’m a little jealous,” Tessa replied and I giggled.

“I wouldn’t say this was a fairytale—more like one of those urban romances I like to read.”

Tessa and I shared a laugh.

“Girl, exactly like it!” she shouted into the phone still in laughter. This felt good. Tessa’s laughter had been one of the only things I missed.

“How do I look?” I asked her as I twirled in front of the camera. I was wearing a pair of jeans and a white button-down shirt. The red apron that read Vanessa’s was tightly wrapped around my waist. I had taken Aunt Vanessa up on her offer to help around the restaurant. I figured it would be fun and help pass the time while I was here.

“Perfect. I can’t believe you're going to work at a restaurant.”

I couldn’t believe it either.

“It’s London’s aunt's restaurant, and I figured it’ll help me gain work experience.”

“You're crazy; restaurant work is hard.”

“Probably, but I won’t know unless I try.” I gave myself one last glance in the mirror before running down the stairs. I had to be at work in ten minutes.

“I guess you’re right. You're on an island somewhere and you choose to go to work.” She shook her head back and forth in disapproval. Choosing not to respond, I grabbed my purse.

“I have to go before I’m late on my first day.” I disconnected the call before she could say anything further. I liked being able to talk to Tessa, but

I didn’t need her opinion now. I was doing this. Placing my phone in my purse, I headed out the door. The sun and fresh breeze sailed through my nose. It felt weird walking the path to the market without London, but there was a certain peace that came over me as I walked the beach alone. I was starting my first day of work. I couldn’t help but feel a little anxious. I rounded the stairs and walked into the door of the restaurant.

“Monroe!” Alyza greeted me, throwing her arms around me in a hug.

“Reporting for duty.” I fanned my apron.

“Great; come with me. I’m going to show you the ropes.” She walked off, signaling for me to follow her. I moved my feet quickly across the tiled floor. There were no customers yet, just a bunch of empty tables and chairs. As we walked around the restaurant, I could see Alyza’s mouth moving, but my nervousness wouldn’t allow me to focus on what she was saying.

“Girl, are you listening?” Alyza came to a stop, and my body crashed right into hers.

“Huh… y-yeah,” I stuttered. “I’m sorry, just nervous.”

“It’s okay, you’ll pretty much just follow me around today and show guests to their seats. That’s it.”

I nodded, attempting to calm my pounding heart.

“There’s my new niece! How are you, beautiful?” Aunt Vanessa screamed as she came walking toward me, arms wide.

“I’m great. Thank you for letting me work here today. I don’t know what I would do all day without London here.” I was so nervous, so I kept running my hands down my apron.

“Nonsense; there’s plenty to do on the island.” She waved me off. “Lyza give you the rundown of your day?” I nodded. “Good. It’s Friday, so things are going to get pretty busy. Just relax and remember Rome wasn’t built in a day.” She patted me on the shoulder before she headed back into the kitchen. I appreciated Aunt Vanessa for this experience. I wasn’t getting paid much for today, but it wasn’t about the earnings. It was about the experience.

“Let’s go get the menus ready.” Alyssa led me over to the front door.

“Have you worked here all your life?” I asked Alyza.

“Yeah, pretty much. This isn’t my only job, though.”

“Really? What else do you do you?”

“I’m a museum curator. I curate artifacts for several museums in the US. When it’s the off-season for me I work here. This place always seems

to bring me peace. What about you?”

“I’ve never had a job. Women aren’t allowed to work in my family.”

Alyza’s eyes bulged, and her mouth flew open.

“In this day and age! That’s crazy!”

“It’s a family tradition.” I shrugged my shoulders as I folded the menus.

“It’s stupid. Women should be able to do as they please just like men do.”

“Well, I’m doing as I please now.”

“I heard that. How does your new husband feel about that?”

I wanted to fill her in on the naked woman that was in his room, but I decided against it.

“Our situation is complicated.”

“Doesn’t look like it. Regardless of the circumstances that brought y’all here, Royale has never proposed or married anyone before. I can’t say he’s in love, but I can say you mean a lot to him.”

“You think so?”

“He left you at his safe house alone.” She unlocked the door. “I know so. Come on; it’s time to greet customers. I see a few walking up. “

I followed behind her and took my place at the entrance. This was my first day of work.

“Welcome to Vanessa’s. How many?” I greeted the first set of customers as I showed them to their seats.

“Finally.” I exhaled as I stumbled into the villa. My feet were feeling a pain I’d never known before. Alyza said it was from wearing sandals to wait tables. I made a mental note to wear tennis shoes tomorrow. Besides the throbbing feet, my first day of work had gone smoothly. I’d made a few minor mistakes, but it wasn’t enough for Aunt Vanessa to fire me. As time went on, I knew I would gain more confidence in my abilities.

Working provided a thrill that I’d never experienced. It had ignited something inside of me and I’d spent most of the day trying to think about what I might enjoy doing for a living. I’d never had the option before and now the options were endless.

I kicked off one sandal at a time before walking into the kitchen. The moment I flicked on the lights I knew something felt different. The inviting scent of fresh flowers filled my nose, and I spotted a beautiful bouquet of red roses and a gift box lying on the counter. Shock filled me as I moved closer. A slight smile appeared on my face while I read the card on the roses.

Chocolate,

You're a working woman now.

Congratulations on your first day of work.

- London

A smile as big as the Grand Canyon displayed on my face at his thoughtfulness. How he'd left this surprise to celebrate my first day of work from out of town was insane. I looked around briefly hoping he'd appear out of nowhere so I could thank him, but that was a long shot. London had surgery until later this evening. I picked up the gift box and removed the lid. A book on healing from family trauma stared back at me. My heart skipped a beat as I combed my fingers through the pages. I'd asked him to heal me, and this was his response. Some women would be offended, but I was in awe of his effort. As I strummed through the book, a brown note fell out and into the palm of my hand. My eyes scanned the message.

You asked me to heal you, but I can't.

I can only offer my hand to hold while you heal yourself.

I glazed over the message a few more times, allowing it to seep into my soul. London was truly unlike any other man I'd ever encountered, and I honestly didn't know how to proceed. A small arrow in the corner of the paper told me to flip it over. This time instead of the typed cursive font the message was handwritten.

Go get dressed. I'm taking you on a self-care date. First door on the left.

I smiled reading London's note. I didn't know what I'd done to deserve such treatment, but I was grateful. I admired the flowers for a while before running upstairs to get dressed for my self-care date. London had this idea in his head that I needed freedom, but I was beginning to think the only thing I needed was him.

As I entered the bedroom, I was greeted by a beautiful silk pajama set hanging on the bathroom door. I wasted no time running into the bathroom and jumping in the shower. I couldn't wait to see what London had planned

for me. I washed my body quickly and placed my hair into puff balls. For some reason, it felt like I should apply a little bit of makeup, so I did. Just enough to give me the perfect natural glow.

If this was a date, I wanted to look my best. I slid my oiled body into the silk pajama set. It fit me perfectly, making me do a little twerk and three-sixty in the mirror. Nobody could tell me I didn't look like I belonged in a TLC video. I was giving nineties fine, and for the first time in a long time, I felt comfortable in my skin—like nobody else's opinions of me mattered. This moment needed to be documented. Taking out my camera, I snapped a few selfies before trotting off down the hall to the first door on the left as the note had instructed.

"Should I knock?" I asked myself as I stared at the white door. My hand moved back and forth between turning the knob to tapping on the door. Deciding I didn't want to startle anyone if some awaited me, I knocked. When I received no response, I turned the doorknob. Tears instantly slipped from my eyes.

"Oh my God!" I gasped as I spun slowly around the room taking it all in. Every wall was covered from floor to ceiling in books. London had made me a little home library. My mouth dropped, and my hand flew to my lips in a pure state of disbelief. There had to be over two hundred titles in here. My feet guided me around the room, and my hand touching the spines of every book I could reach. Some of the titles were familiar and some weren't. I walked the length of the shelves until I reached a fuzzy rug that housed a cozy looking recliner. In front of the chair, a small end table sat with a bottle of chilled wine. Another note lay on the table.

Because you said reading brings you peace. This date is with your peace.

More tears rained down my face. I didn't know how London had managed to pull this off, but I was honored that he would go through all this trouble for me. Suddenly, my legs were too weak to support my body. Slowly, I lowered myself into the chair, allowing my body to slink down into the cushions. I couldn't wrap my head around how a man I'd just met could know exactly what I needed and when I needed it from many miles away.

The urge to hear his voice and thank him for this swept over me. Pulling out my phone, I went to his contact and pressed call. He could have very well been in surgery still, but I had to try. The phone rang four times before

going to the voicemail. I sighed, deciding on sending him a selfie of me in my new library instead. I captioned it, enjoying my self-care date, and pressed send. Grabbing the bottle of wine and the glass off the table, I poured myself a drink. Snuggling up into the chair, I pulled a book off the shelf closest to me and cracked it open. I didn't get far before my phone started vibrating in my lap. Seeing London's name flash across the screen, I swiped to answer the video call.

"Hey," I greeted him as he came into view looking fine as hell in his white coat.

"How are you enjoying your date?" His deep voice sailed into the phone. "You look beautiful."

I smiled. "It's perfect. How did you do this, and when?"

"A magician never reveals his secret." He smirked, causing me to giggle.

"This was a magic trick because I didn't see not one book get carried into this room."

"I'm glad you were surprised."

"I was; thank you. You didn't have to do any of this. I'm very grateful." I stared into the screen as he moved around what appeared to be his office. London had to be the finest doctor practicing. The way he could pull off scrubs and street attire was the sexiest thing on this planet.

"I read somewhere that healing begins with self-love. An important piece of self-love is being comfortable alone. You comfortable, Chocolate?" He plopped down in a chair behind his desk.

"Very!" I pulled the phone back so he could see how I was lounging in the chair. I watched as he bit into his bottom lip. His eyes were locked on me.

"You know you're fucking beautiful." It was more of a statement than a question.

"I do," I boasted. London's face lit up, and he broke into laughter.

"Oh, you cocky now, huh? Must be them silk pajamas."

My mouth fell open.

"Yep, my inner Chili coming out," I joked back. "No for real… I have you to thank for this newfound confidence. So, thank you." I blew a kiss into the phone.

"Nah, Chocolate, this is all you. I'm just holding your hand remember?" He referenced the note that he'd put in the self-care book.

“And I appreciate every moment. This is perfect.” There weren’t enough words to express how thankful I was for everything London was doing for me. He was truly heaven-sent.

“You're perfect.” He shot back. At this point, I was smiling so hard my face hurt. A knock on his door sounded, and I could see the change in his demeanor. He was going back into doctor mode. “I have to get back to work, Chocolate. Sleepover again tonight?” He was referring to how we had fallen asleep on the phone last night. I’d been pissed at him, but it all seemed to fade. Whatever this was, whatever we were doing, I was going to lean into it fully. There was no chance that God had made a mistake sending this man into my life.

“Yes, just make sure your weekly whore is canceled this time.” I giggled, but I was serious.

“Everybody been canceled, Chocolate.” His voice was firm, and the smile that was plastered on his face had me speechless. This was the second time he expressed dropping everyone for me, and it made my heart swell. The knock on his office door sounded again, making him stand from his desk.

“Enjoy your date.”

“I will!” I replied, waving goodbye as I disconnected the call.

OceanofPDF.com

London

"You're perfect." I stared into the camera at Monroe's beautiful face. I was fresh out of surgery when the picture of her in the library room I'd set up for her came through my phone. I damn near broke my neck running to my office to call her back. I was desperate as fuck to see her and hear her voice. It had been a little over a week since I'd seen her in person. Being without her had been hell. It was a testament to how attached to her I was.

A knock at the door pulled my attention away from Monroe.

"Dr. London, there's someone in the lobby requesting to see you," Rebecca said from the other side of the door. People didn't request to see me, so that already had me on alert. I opened my laptop and clicked on the security camera system. Kashus Grant and two other men were waiting in the lobby. I sighed. I knew it was only a matter of time before he showed up here or sent someone else looking for Monroe. I'd been waiting.

"I'll be out in a minute," I informed her.

"Okay." I heard Rebecca step away from the door and take off down the hall. I returned my attention to Monroe. She looked so happy lounging in her recliner. It had taken me a few thousand to get her library room set up in a such a short time, but she was worth it. I smiled at her. She was never going to have to worry about anything again, especially the nigga that was standing in my lobby.

“I have to get back to work, beautiful. Sleepover again tonight?” Last night had been one of my most peaceful nights of sleep. It was the closest I’d come to spending the night with a woman in years. I could only imagine what it would be like to actually sleep next to her.

“Yes, just make sure your weekly whore is canceled this time.” I smirked at her mention of Briana. No doubt her image would forever be ingrained in her head, but Monroe didn’t need to worry about Briana or any other woman for that matter. I was already a sucker for her.

“Everybody been canceled, Chocolate.”

Her face lit up, providing me with my new favorite image. My eyes bounced between Monroe and the security cameras. Kashus and his guests were heckling Rebecca. I shook my head. The knocking returned on my office door, and I stood to my feet.

“Enjoy your date,” I told Monroe before hanging up the phone and moving toward the door.

“Royale, I’m this close to cussing somebody out!” Samara yelled from the other side of the door just as I swung it open. “Those niggas are rude. You know them, or do I need to get my gun?” She popped her hands on her hips. Samara stayed ready to shoot a nigga. She was a little Pitbull. I had instilled in her not to tolerate disrespect from nobody, especially not a nigga.

“I got it.” I assured her. I hadn’t filled Samara or anyone here in on our marriage. They wouldn’t understand, and I didn’t want their opinions. I was going to marry Monroe with or without their blessings, so it didn’t matter. The less they knew, the better. Aunt Vanessa was different because she’d always been my confidant. The moment she saw me in Havana with Monroe, she knew something was up, and I wasn’t about to lie to her. So, I told her the truth.

“Okay.” She glanced at me suspicion stained on her face, but she didn’t protest. I rounded the corner and could hear elevated voices in the lobby area. Instantly, I became pissed. I just knew that Kashus wasn’t in here disrespecting my staff and place of business. That was one thing I didn’t play about.

“Aye, why you acting like you don’t remember me? I was here a couple of days ago with my fiancée. Her name is Monroe Iris. She came here to get a surgery done. She has an aftercare appointment today. She is waiting for me to go back there.”

His voice was past the level of appropriate volume to speak to a woman. Immediately, I walked up behind Rebecca, and Samara was right behind me.

“Dr. London!” Rebecca exhaled a breath of relief.

“What’s the problem?”

“This gentleman is asking questions about a patient, but I told him I couldn’t disclose patient information. It violates HIPAA laws.” She rolled her eyes toward Kashus.

“I got it from here.” I rounded the desk and stepped into the lobby. I wasn’t sure if he recognized me or not. We’d only met briefly at his birthday party. I assumed if he was coming looking around here, he’d done his research and knew exactly who I was. I was going to use that to my advantage—make his ass think I was not a threat to him.

“Kashus Grant! What do I owe the pleasure?” I walked up to him.

“Dr. Royale London. The only nigga that would trade being CAPO for a pair of scrubs.” He laughed. “I wasn’t sure if you’d remember me. Meechie only introduced us briefly at my party. How are you, my guy?”

“I’m great. Just got married a few days ago, my nigga. Walk with me.” I signaled for him to follow me to my office. He nodded before telling the two white boys who were with him to stay back. I wanted so badly to knock his ass out for playing with Monroe, but I’d learned over the years that the best revenge wasn’t physical. Niggas who had a God complex like Kashus needed to be brought back down to earth, and I was just the one to humble him.

“What brings you to Miami yelling at my employees and shit, nigga?” I opened the door to my office and allowed him to walk inside.

“My bad about that, man. My fiancée been MIA for a few days. I figured she was just mad at a nigga. Now I’m getting a little worried.” He walked over to the extra chair in my office and had a seat.

“Damn, so your fiancée missing?” I played along. “What that got to do with me? That sound like some shit for the police.” I took a seat behind my desk. While I had him here, I was going to fish for information to make sure everything was going as planned.

“You know we don’t get the police involved unless we have to. Twelve starts looking around and find some shit that’s gon’ have my ass behind bars.” He reclined back into the chair. His demeanor was too relaxed for a nigga that had a missing fiancée.

“Don’t I know it, but again, how does this pertain to me?”

“She was in town to get her body done by you. I’m just trying to see if she showed up for any of her appointments.”

I nodded. He was playing perfectly into my plan.

“No problem. What’s her name?” I knew her name. I’d changed it to include mine, but I sat there and scribbled it down as if her beautiful name hadn’t been on my lips a few moments ago.

“Monroe Iris.”

I dropped the pen and gave a worried expression.

“Oh, damn. I didn’t do her surgery.”

“What?” Kashus sat up in his seat.

“She didn’t pass the mental health screening.”

“Mental health screening?” he questioned.

“Yeah, we give it to all our patients. It’s a way to make sure they not getting the surgery for the wrong reasons. It’s our way of weeding out people that are being forced to get the procedure done.” I eyed him. His eyes avoided contact. I said that just to see his reaction.

“So, she hasn’t been here?”

“On Monday for her first appointment. I took her a refund check that night to her hotel. Did you check there?” Any nigga with common sense would have pulled the security footage by now. Knowing I was on it, I offered the information before he’d asked.

“Fuck!” he cursed just as a text came through my phone. I glanced at it seeing Monroe’s name flash on the screen. She’d sent me another picture. I opened the text thread fast as fuck. I wasn’t ready for the image that popped up on my screen. Monroe sat in the chair holding a strawberry to her beautiful lips. She had just the right amount of titties showing. The message she sent said, ‘thank you for dinner’. My dick jumped at the sight of her, and a grin appeared on my face as I texted her back.

Me: You got your delivery.

I pushed send and returned my attention to her sorry ass ex-fiancé. “Would she have reason to flee? Happy women don’t leave they whole life behind. You been fucking up or something, nigga?”

“Man, I treat her ass like a queen. She got it good. She doesn’t work or do shit. Just sit on her ass, gain weight, and spend my money.”

My fists balled underneath the table. It was taking everything in me not to punch his ass in the face. My phone dinged again. Monroe had texted

back.

Wife: Yes, I love seafood and the fruit platter is everything! Thank you!

Me: Anything for your healing.

I wasn't a smiling ass nigga, but Monroe had me cheesing hard. I stared down at the phone waiting for her to respond like a desperate ass nigga.

"I think she might have run off with my cousin. He's her security and ain't nobody heard from either of them. I thought the nigga was gay," Kashus blurted, making me look up from my phone.

Wrong, I thought to myself.

"Damn!" I shook my head before dropping it back down to the phone just as another picture from Monroe came through. She was supposed to be on a self-care date, but I appreciated her including me. In a short time, Monroe become someone I craved.

"I don't have a lot of pull in my family organization anymore, but I'll put a word out." I was gaslighting him. He was none the wiser to Monroe's whereabouts.

"I appreciate it, nigga. I already hollered at Demetrius. He doing what he can. I'm just dreading telling her pops. Shit, I need to find out something before I report back to that nigga."

I sat up, intrigued. I had done a ton of digging on Monroe's father, but I'd only gotten back the basics. He was a rich and powerful mafia boss. What I couldn't figure out was what he gained from having Monroe married off the Kashus Grant. Jacob Iris was a big kingpin with a highly respected family legacy. On paper, it seemed that the only one benefiting from the arrangement was Kashus. That couldn't be all there was.

"Her father in the business?"

"Yeah… Jacob Iris. He founded the black mafia organization back in Bristol."

"And you're engaged to his daughter?"

Monroe sent another picture. This time she was topless, reading a book. My eyes damn near popped out of their sockets.

Me: You're so fucking beautiful.

"Yeah, the biggest crime family in Bristol City, and I'm going to be the head of it all. The nigga dying, and he needs an heir. All I have to do is marry his daughter, and what I do? I fucking lose her." Kashus dropped his face between his hands. Monroe's father was dying. That explained why

he’d chosen Kashus as her husband. He was desperate to find someone capable of carrying on his legacy. My heart immediately went out to Monroe. In everything she’d confided in me about her father, his dying wasn’t one of them.

“Damn; he got cancer or something?” I exited from Monroe’s text thread and shot Meechie an emergency text. I needed this meeting with Jacob Iris scheduled as soon as possible. Finding out about his failing health changed things.

“Skin cancer or some shit.” He informed me. I dropped my head. I was dreading having to break this news to Monroe. As fucked up as her father was, he was still her father and all she had left in the world. This news would devastate her. My phone vibrated and another message from Monroe came through.

Wife: Thank you. 😘

I sighed heavily contemplating when to tell her. She had the right to know. This stupid nigga was waiting around for her father to die and hadn’t told her anything.

“You been over there cheesing like jester cat the entire time. I can tell you a newlywed, nigga.” My head lifted toward him. The longer he sat here the more I wanted to come out of retirement and place a bullet in his head.

“Yeah, man. I was pissed I had to climb out her sweet ass pussy to come here and deal with this shit.” I shot back at him.

“I get it. I had to leave my bitch back home to come down here and look for Monroe’s ass. Her disappearance really fucking up my plans.”

That was it. I was done with this visit. Another word and I’d be burying his stupid ass in the backyard somewhere. Standing from my chair, I rounded my desk.

“Work calls, nigga.” I moved toward the door. Kashus stood and followed me. “Sorry, I couldn’t be of more help.” I escorted him out of my office and down the hall to the lobby.

“Naw, you were plenty of help.” He reached his hand out to give me a handshake. “You ever back in Bristol City, fuck with me.”

“Bet, maybe my wife and I will stop through.”

“Let me know.” He nodded as he signaled for the men he’d come with to follow him out the door. I stood there watching him leave. Everything I’d just been told weighed heavily on my spirit.

“You keeping secrets now, Royale?” Samara’s voice thundered from behind me. I turned around slowly, feeling slightly amused by how she was standing. I knew her ass had been ear-hustling on my conversation. “What’s this about a wife, and what is that on your hand?” Her eyes darted toward the wedding band on my left hand before she grabbed my arm, bringing my hand closer to her face.

“Oh this? I got married last weekend.” I pulled away from her and walked over to the front desk.

“That man comes back, you let me know before he even gets in the door,” I informed Rebecca. Kashus’s next visit was not going to be a pleasant one. One thing I knew for sure was that niggas acted crazy when their ego was bruised. Once he realized I had taken his fiancée and his chance to head the Iris mafia, he was going to be sick. I was going to have to handle him before he caused any harm.

“I’ll put security on alert too,” I informed her as I walked toward my office. I didn’t have to tell her to follow. I knew Samara was right behind me.

“What is going on, Royale? I know gangsters when I see them, and you talking about you got married, what—”

“We can talk when we get to the office.” She knew I wasn’t about to discuss my personal business out in the open. We walked in silence the rest of the way, but as soon as we entered my office and I shut the door, Samara started shooting off questions.

“Talk… ’cause who were those men? Are you getting back into that lifestyle? Are they trying to extort you or something?”

“I got married while I was in Cuba, and that man was my new wife’s ex-fiancé.”

Samara’s mouth dropped, and she stumbled to the loveseat that I kept in my office.

“What?”

“Monroe was in an arranged marriage, and I’m helping her get out.”

“Monroe?” She was thinking, probably trying to figure out where she’d heard that name before.

“Monroe Iris,,, she was a patient,” I told her. I watched the moment her brain connected the dots.

“The woman that didn’t pass the screening. I knew something was going on with you that day!”

“Yeah, her fiancé was forcing her to get the surgery, or he wouldn’t go through with the marriage. She needed help, and I offered it.” I didn’t want to go into details, so I told Samara only the basics to satisfy some of her questions.

“Let me ask you this: If you're just helping a friend, then why are you wearing the ring?”

I smirked at her observation. I could always count on my sister to call me out on my bullshit.

“I may be a little more invested,” I admitted, causing Samara to squeal.

“You love her, don’t you?”

I didn’t get a chance to answer her as my phone vibrated. Meechie was finally giving me a call back.

“This Meechie. I have to take this call.” I signaled for Samara to leave.

“Well since we dropping secrets, I’ve been secretly dating Demetrius. Tell him I said hi.” She stood from the loveseat and exited my office before I could say anything. Now it was my turn to drop my mouth. I didn’t know how to feel about Samara fucking with my best friend. It was a lot to process and I didn’t have time to worry about that right now. Right now, my attention was on Monroe.

“Yeah, nigga?” Mechie answered the call.

“You fucking my sister?” I couldn’t hold it in.

“Look, nigga. I was gon’ tell you when shit got more serious. Samara been having me chasing her ’round playing games for months.”

I rubbed my hand across my forehead. There was so much I needed to discuss with him when it came down to dating my sister. I didn’t want Samara involved in cartel shit and Meechie was the fucking ringleader.

“You know how I feel about Samara.”

“I know, bruh. I wouldn’t even be pursuing her if I wasn’t going to do right by her,” he replied. I knew that already. Samara would be in good hands with Meechie. He wouldn’t do shit that would jeopardize our friendship. We sat there for a minute in silence before my mind traveled back to Monroe and I remembered what I needed to tell him.

“Jacob Iris is dying,” I blurted.

“That’s a new development.”

“Yeah, a big one. That nigga Kashus just stopped by to see me.” I rubbed my hand across my face. Negotiating with a mobster was one thing, but negotiating with one that was dying was something else. By marrying

Monroe, had I just intercepted his dying plans? Without Monroe marrying Kashus, he had no one to take over when he was gone.

"So the marriage was because he needed an heir?"

"Arranging marriages is definitely a family tradition, but marrying Monroe off to a nigga with two baby mamas and forcing his daughter to undergo surgery, that's a direct result of being desperate."

"Damn," Meechie mumbled. We sat in silence for a moment, both thinking about our next move—both knowing what was on the table.

"You willing to trade yo' freedom for Monroe's?" Meechie blurted the one thing we were both thinking. I'd replaced Kashus as Monroe's husband, so by default I had to replace Jacob Iris as leader of the Iris mafia upon his death. I'd ran from my duties in my crime family and right into another.

"Did you get the meeting set up?" I ignored his last question. I wasn't ready to answer that shit yet.

"Come on now; you know how I roll. We meet with him tomorrow night. He doesn't want to leave his home. So we gotta go to Bristol." He confirmed.

"I guess we going to Bristol." I disconnected the call.

Was I ready to trade my freedom for Monroe's? That question was going to keep me up all night.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

“Come on in!” A tall woman with sienna colored skin greeted me as I approached the entrance of a small, dingy building. I was hesitant to enter, but the rain pouring down behind me forced me inside. After a long day at Aunt Vanessa’s restaurant, I’d come home to another note from London. He instructed me to put on a beautiful dress and a car would bring me to this address. I didn’t know what to think at first, but the flashbacks of how beautiful last night’s self-care date was flooded my brain.

I’d fallen asleep reading in the library room that London had gifted me. It was the most peaceful time I'd had in a long time. I was curious to see what another date had in store for me. So as instructed, I’d gotten ready in the turquoise swing dress London had placed on my bed, called a car, and came to this address.

“Do you have a reservation, Senorita?” the woman questioned as I stepped through the front door. I took in the scenery. Loud, muffled music could be heard coming from somewhere inside.

“Monroe Iri—”

“Oh, Senorita London.” She cut me off. “I’m glad you made it. A second later and you would have been soaked.” She spoke English, but it was coated in her thick Cuban accent. One thing I loved about Cuba was the diversity of the residents here. There were so many shades of black—it was beautiful. I watched the woman as she scribbled something down on a

notepad. I wasn't sure what type of place this was. The only signage outside was in Spanish, and I hadn't had any time to Google it.

"Follow me. I'll show you to your section." She took off down a long hallway and then started descending a flight of stairs. I followed her, scared of what I had gotten myself into but not enough to turn back. The music I'd heard before got louder with each step as the destination came into view. There was a huge open floorplan with a bar wrapped around it and a DJ in the corner. *An underground club?* A thousand thoughts clouded my mind. Why had he sent me on a self-care date to a club?

We walked past a few people dancing and into a secluded area. The club wasn't crowded. There were only a few women and men present, and the sound of Daddy Yankee filled the air.

"This is your section, Mrs. London."

I looked around the area. There were a few bottles of champagne on the table. Was I expected to drink all of those? I'd never been to a club alone before. It was weird. My hands fidgeted down my body nervously.

"Don't worry; Fridays are for beginners."

"Beginners?" I questioned. What had London gotten me into?

"Yes, salsa lessons. They start shortly. The champagne is yours; enjoy. If you want anything stronger, the server will be out shortly."

I nodded as I took a seat on the small sofa allowing the music to soothe me. My foot tapped along with the rhythm of the music. I had never taken salsa or any dance lessons for that matter, so this was new to me. I was confused about how this qualified as a self-care date but intrigued at the same time.

London had gone through all this trouble to set up another nice evening for me, and that was all that mattered. The music dimmed and a short petite lady I assumed to be the salsa instructor took the stage. She was talking, but I could only make out small portions of what she was saying because I wasn't fluent in Spanish. I heard her introduce herself as Francesca before the music started and she began swinging her hips and body across the stage. She moved effortlessly as if nobody else was in the room. I couldn't take my eyes off her as she danced. It was beautiful and fun. The crowd cheered as she performed, and I found myself dancing in my seat. When it was over, she turned to the crowd, and everyone moved close to the stage forming rows. I thought briefly about joining them, but my nerves got the best of me.

“Are you here for the salsa lessons?" a woman approached my section and asked. I contemplated how to answer that before settling on a simple head nod.

“First day?”

I nodded again.

“Mine too. My name is Selena. I was wondering if you wanted to tackle this thing together.”

I stared at the stranger for a minute before I threw caution out the window and stood to my feet.

“Let’s do it,” I agreed. We walked over to the crowd and found a space in the back row. I watched as the instructor broke down the dance moves. It was a bit awkward dancing with strangers at first, but as time moved on, I found myself getting lost in the music.

“This is fun!” I called out to Selina. She had also relaxed and seemed to be enjoying the experience.

“It is. You’re a natural. Can I get you something to drink?” she shouted over the music. She brought her body to a halt, and I smiled as the realization of what she had just said hit me. She wasn’t a newbie. She was the server. *Wow!*

“You played me?” I was yelling over the music, but the whole thing had me amused.

“It got you up out of your seat, didn’t it?” I couldn’t do nothing but smile. She had gotten me up and moving, and I was grateful. Had she not come over, I would of probably never joined in.

“It did; thank you,” I told her.

“Don’t thank me; thank Mr. London. It was his idea.” She started walking off toward the bar. The mention of his name had me smiling from ear to ear. This man thought of everything. He knew I would be too afraid to try it on my own.

“Still… thank you.”

“No problem. About that drink, what can I bring you?” she questioned, but I wasn’t in the mood to drink. Selena returned to the bar and placed a black apron around her waist.

“No, thank you,” I replied, returning my attention to the instructor, this time making my way to the middle of the crowd. I allowed the music to control my body as my hips swung back and forth, and my feet carried me across the floor—one dance and another. I was wrapped up in the moment,

enjoying my time with the other participants of the class. It felt like I was a part of a small community. Everyone was so welcoming and encouraging of one another. By the end of the lesson, I was beaming with joy and sweat. I had never felt so alive and confident in my entire life, and I had London to thank for it all.

As the crowd began to dissipate, I stayed on the floor dancing, even after the class was over. I was truly at peace. As I swayed my hips, I could feel every ounce of me letting go in a way I never had before. I'd spent my entire life preparing for the future. It felt good to live in the moment.

"Your car is outside," Selena informed me, causing me to stop moving. I was exhausted, but I didn't want to stop.

"Thank you." My feet moved to the exit, but not before getting the information on the weekly dance classes they offered. As I slid into the back seat of the taxi, I smiled. London had given me the best gift today. The gift of trying something new and stepping out of my comfort zone. The urge to hear his voice took over, and I dialed his number.

"Yes, Chocolate?" his deep voice sailed into my ears and straight to my vagina.

"Thank you," was the first thing I said.

"You enjoyed your night out dancing?"

"It was everything."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. Dancing is a great form of self-care."

"I can see why. I never felt so free."

"Freer than when you cumming on my dick?"

"Yes." I lied. "Don't talk about your dick. I've been drinking, and I get horny." There was so much lust and need in my words.

"Touch her for me." His voice was low and dark.

"The driver," I protested.

"Roll up the partition." I didn't think twice before touching the button and allowing the glass to seclude me in the back of the car.

"Touch her. I want to know what you are learning about yourself," he commanded, and I found myself spreading my legs and pushing my panties to the side. I ran my finger across my pearl, and a moan escaped my mouth.

"That's right."

Everything about this was crazy and out of character, but London made me feel so free. London knew how to follow my lead and take charge when needed. Nothing ever felt forced with him, and it turned me on. Holding the

phone in one hand, I used the other one to massage my clit. My head instantly fell back from the pleasure.

“Ooh.” A soft moan escaped my lips. I had masturbated before, but never in the back seat of a car as a stranger drove me down the highway.

“You sound so fucking beautiful playing with your pussy.” He growled into the phone. His voice provided the perfect soundtrack to my movements as I worked my middle, sticking two fingers inside my hole. My hips rolled as I strummed my clit.

“Let me hear you, Chocolate. I want to hear you.” London coached me. “How many fingers are you using?”

“Two,” I moaned.

“Naw, use three.” I did as he instructed and inserted another finger into my middle.

“Oh fuck!” I cried out. I didn’t care that the driver could hear me. I panted into the phone as I closed my eyes and envisioned London in between my legs.

“That’s it! Let me hear those pretty sex sounds.” His words echoed in my head. In my head, it was him between my thighs, bringing me to my peak. “Open your legs wider and dig deep into that pussy. You need this.”

He was right. I did need this. I turned my body to the side and let one of my legs fall onto the seat cushion.

“Oh my God,” I moaned. I was on the verge of releasing.

“Just like that, Chocolate. Now tell me what you're learning about yourself.” He coached me. I could barely form any words from the pleasure that shot through my body.

“Oh, ah,” was all I could manage to say.

“Tell me.” He insisted.

“I’m learning… oh… um…” I stumbled over my words.

“Tell me!” This time, his voice was deeper.

“I’m stronger than I think.”

“You are. Tell me more, Chocolate.”

“I’m beautiful!” I shouted as I thrust my fingers deeper inside me.

“What else? What did you learn tonight?”

I thought about what I’d learned tonight. It was so much.

“Tell me!” his voice thundered in my ear.

“I can have fun by myself. I can seek out new experiences. I can create my own happiness. I’m cumming!” I moaned at the top of my lungs as my

juices sprayed onto my hand.

“Damn, Chocolate.” He growled into the phone. “You satisfied, beautiful?”

“Yes, I still miss you, though.”

“Same here. Check it, I’m about to walk into a meeting. I’ll call you later tonight.”

“Thank you.” I blew a kiss into the phone, and I pulled my dress back over my thighs. There was no way I could stop myself from falling for this man. I believed I had already fallen.

`

OceanofPDF.com

London

"You a nasty motherfucker." Meechie grinned as I returned from the private plane bathroom.

"You a nosy motherfucker!" I shot back, slapping him on his head as I walked past him to my seat. I removed myself when I saw Monroe's name flash across my screen. I didn't want Meechie to take over my phone call. He was obsessed with his new sister-in-law. It was cute, and Meechie was my boy, but his ass talked way too much. The way I'd been missing Monroe, I needed her all to myself. I hadn't planned on coaching her through an orgasm, but the need for sexual pleasure was heavy in her voice the moment I said hello.

"Don't touch me with yo' sweaty dick hands, nigga. I heard you in there beating yo' meat."

I stared at his stupid ass for a minute. I wasn't jacking off because it did nothing for me. I needed a woman's touch. Plus, I had my headphones in when I was talking to Monroe, so it was no way he heard her beautiful moans.

"You a fool, you know that!" I shot back as we both shared a laugh. "Mind yo' fucking business."

"Yo' business is my business, nigga. You know that already."

"Since when?" I questioned as I moved my mouth to mimic his answer.

"Since diapers, nigga."

He'd been saying that same thing since we were kids.

“Yeah, yeah.” I waved him off.

“So, you and sis already fucking, huh?”

I couldn’t tell if he was asking a question or making a statement. So, I ignored him. I wasn’t about to discuss Monroe like some random ho. She was more to me than that.

“I could tell by yo’ silence something don’ popped off,” he said just as the flight attendant announced our flight was landing.

“I’m invested.” I offered that as I buckled my seat belt to prepare for landing.

“You falling for her, ain’t you? Y’all gon’ make this shit official?”

That time, he was posing a question. One that had been floating through my brain a thousand times. If I talked about my feelings for Monroe with anybody, it would be to Meechie. Like he’d said, he had been in my business since diapers.

“Falling, nigga… Nah, I’m on the floor.” I admitted, and a huge weight lifted from my shoulders.

“So y’all gon’ like take this marriage shit for real?” I shook my head. “Why not? What’s the holdup?” He threw his hands in the air.

“Monroe ain’t never had the opportunity to be free—make her own choices. She needs to heal. She doesn’t need another man forcing some shit upon her.” That’s exactly what I would be doing if I pursued her in that manner. Sex was one thing but pursuing her was another.

“Yeah, but what if she needs everything that you are?”

I turned my head to stare at him as our plane touched down in Bristol. I was trying to figure out where my best friend had gone.

“Nigga, when did you start making sense?”

“I always make sense.” He laughed.

“I just don’t want to force her into anything. This is about her more than it's about me.”

“If you say so, nigga. You know I’m riding either way.”

“You got the recording?” I asked. Meechie nodded.

“Sending it to yo’ phone now,” he replied. I smirked. Kashus Grant was easy to catch up. All it took was a few light-skinned big booty strippers to get him on a recording talking foul about Monroe and snorting cocaine up his nose. He planned to get her strung out on drugs after he took over her father's business. I already had plans to fuck him up, but now I was going to

put two in his head. You ready to go talk to her pops?" Meechie asked just as the flight attendants opened the door.

"Let's go!" I growled. I had never been afraid to talk to anybody, but this impromptu meeting with Monroe's dad had me a little bothered. It didn't have anything to do with him, but I knew after I secured her freedom, she would be free to leave. The thought of Monroe out there in the world without me was scary, but like I said… This wasn't about me. It was about Monroe and had been since day one.

THE IRIS ESTATE WAS EXACTLY HOW I'D PICTURED IT TO BE. IT REMINDED me a lot of my childhood home. It was big and flashy with security guards posted all around. It was the life to be had for everyone on the outside looking in, but for people like me and Monroe, it had been our prison. I got out of the car and handed my keys to the valet before walking up the stairs. Meechie was right on the side of me. Before we could reach the front door, we were swarmed by security. We knew the deal. It was a standard greeting for a meeting of this caliber. I threw my hands up, removing the gun that I kept tucked at my waist. Meechie did the same.

"Be careful with her. That's my baby!" I handed my favorite gun to security. I wasn't afraid to go in without protection. Jacob Iris wasn't foolish enough to start a war by taking me and Meechie out. I was certain he didn't want to spend his last days alive at war with the London Cartel.

"Weapons will be returned to you upon leaving," one of the guards informed us as he allowed us to enter.

Another man instructed, "Take them to Iris." We were led down a long hallway. I scanned the walls for pictures or any sign of Monroe's childhood but found nothing. The walls were bare except for the expensive paintings and art plastered around. The guard led us to the back of the house and into a back room I assumed to be Mr. Iris's office.

"Sir, your visitors are here."

"Only Royale enters." His voice sailed through the air, and the guard put his body between me and the door, blocking Meechie from entering.

"You good with that, Ro?" Meechie shouted over the guard.

I nodded as I stepped further inside the room. Mr. Iris was standing in the window behind his desk. Even from behind, I could tell the toll the cancer was taking on him.

“Royale London.” Mr. Iris greeted me as I entered the room. “I was confused when this meeting was requested, so I did some digging. You kidnapped my daughter and married her without my permission.”

He’d done his research. I wasn’t surprised.

“Give me one reason why I shouldn’t shoot you where you stand.” He turned around, gun pointed at my head. I took in his appearance. He looked tired, no doubt, from the cancer. It had to have been months since Monroe had seen her father because if she had seen him like this, she would have known he was sick.

Still, even in his ailing state, he exuded power. He reminded me a lot of my father.

“For the record, I didn’t kidnap her. She came willingly.” I walked over to the chair in front of his desk and sat. His having a gun pointed at me didn’t scare me one bit. Just like him, I had been raised for this. I had my first gun placed in my face at seven. I wasn’t easily intimidated. “Killing me would make your daughter a widow.”

“Huh, I don’t see the problem in that. I kill you, and she goes on to marry Kashus as planned. Problem solved.” He snarled.

“The only problem is you don’t want Kashus to run your business. Your daughter has been missing for a week, and he hasn’t told you anything. He’s been hanging out in strip clubs over him finding your daughter.” I looked him directly in his eyes as I spoke. He didn’t say anything… just kept his pistol on me.

“I know your delicate situation. You need an heir. Monroe can’t be because she’s a woman, and the mafia won’t allow it. Your unborn son is too late. Monroe marrying Kashus is… was your only choice no matter the cost, huh? You wagered her body. Taught her to be a doormat to a bum ass nigga that treats her like nothing.” I could see his hand twitching in anger.

“Many women before her have done it. My mother included,” he replied, causing me to stare at him as if he was insane. This was exactly why I was here to get Monroe away from his ass. His ideologies about women were old and outdated.

“Saying that others have endured is not a good enough reason.”

“My daughter, my business!” he yelled.

“Wrong, my wife, my business.” I smirked. “Look, I’m here as a courtesy. I have taken Monroe as my wife. That means she is now under my protection. You will allow Monroe to live free of her family duties.”

He lowered the gun down, banging the metal against his wooden desk.

“I looked into you—son of Malcom London. I grew up with your father. Our fathers did business together long ago. That’s the only reason why I’ll give grace for your stupidity.” He folded his hands together. “You abandoned your family duties, and now you come here asking for my daughter to do the same.”

“We are supposed to give up our lives—our freedom of choice—because someone decided on this lifestyle long before we existed. Nah!” My voice was laced with anger.

“To whom much is given, much is required. We didn’t get to choose this life, and the sacrifices we have to make for it aren’t pretty, but we don’t get to abandon it, damn it! It made us who we are!” His voice thundered, and I saw flashes of my father. Monroe’s father, just like mine, was stuck in his ways. He didn’t care if I was stating facts. He’d made up his mind and didn’t want to change it.

“Frankly, I don’t care what you think of my choice to leave the cartel. Like I said, Monroe is my wife now. She is not your bargaining chip. Make your moves accordingly.”

“Where is my daughter?” His jaw clenched.

“Safe,” was all I offered. It was all he needed to know. Mr. Iris sat back in his chair, biting down on his jaw. He wasn’t used to someone standing their ground against him. I wasn’t here to be friendly. Fake marriage or not, Monroe was mine to protect. I’d promised to be her bodyguard, and I was never going back on my word.

“I’m only going to offer this one time. Annul the marriage and return my daughter to her rightful fiancé.”

I chuckled at the way he thought he was in control.

“I can’t do that. I promised my wife a better life, and I don’t break my promises.” I reached into my pocket and pulled out my phone to play the recording of Kashus.

“What’s this?” Mr. Iris leaned forward.

“Were you aware that the nigga you chose for your heir and your daughter's husband is a coke head?” I pressed play on the video and slid it

closer to him. Mr. Iris's eyes bulged as Kashus came into view, lowering his nose to the table in front of him. He inhaled a white substance up his nose.

"The nigga you picked as heir to your precious family business is a fucking bob head." I shook my head.

"Huh!" He snorted, a smirk crossing over his face. "Everybody has tried a little coke. Haven't you?" He reached down into his drawer and pulled out a clear zip-lock bag with a white substance. A lot of shit didn't surprise me, but watching Jacob Iris snort coke up his nose wasn't on my bingo card for today.

"It is impossible to live in this life and not indulge a time or two." He snorted. I shook my head. There are plenty of people who got caught up in this lifestyle and become addicted to their own supply. My heart broke for Monroe again. She never mentioned her father being on drugs, so I assumed this was also something she was in the dark about too.

"Monroe knows about this?" I questioned. Jacob finished snorting the line of coke he had out on the table.

"Why would Monroe know? She knows only what she needs to." He slid the razor over to me.

"Nah, I'm good." I shook my head. This nigga was crazier than I thought if he thought I was about to join him in congesting that poison in my body.

"Return my daughter. You are not fit to be her husband." He rubbed his hand across his nose. He really must have been out of his fucking mind if he thought I was going to return Monroe to two coked-out motherfuckers.

"I can't do that. Like I said, start making other plans. If you or Kashus come for Monroe, you'll be inciting a war you can't win. It's over. Let her go." I could keep Monroe hidden away until her father died, but who knew how long that would be? Being in hiding and having to look over your shoulder every day was no way to live. Monroe deserved better than that. I needed her father and ex-fiancé to leave her be.

"You can keep Monroe. I'll take care of Kashus if you replace me as head of my organization." He was still using Monroe as a bargaining tool for his own benefit.

"I'm gon' keep Monroe regardless. That's my wife, and she's no longer your bargaining tool." I stood, giving one last glance at Jacob Iris.

"Monroe is my daughter, damn it!" His voice thundered.

“Move accordingly. She’s no longer anyone’s property.” I opened the door to his office.

“You don’t want to go to war with me. You are not a member of the cartel. There's no protection for you!” he shouted as he tapped the gun on his desk. I glanced at Meechie, who was approaching the door. What Mr. Iris said was true. I didn’t have full cartel support. What I had was the support of my best friend who just so happened to control the cartel.

“I guess we’ll find out,” I replied as I walked out of the door.

“Let’s go.” I shot in Meechie’s direction as I walked down the hall.

“Dr. London!” a voice called out from behind me. I turned as Contessa approached me. I’d had seen her on a video call the day of Monroe’s and my wedding but never in person. She was a pretty girl, but she looked much older than Monroe. I would have never guessed they were only a few years apart.

“This is for you,” she whispered discreetly as she slipped a balled-up piece of paper into my hand and disappeared down the hallway. The look in her eyes worried me, and I knew whatever she had just handed me was serious. I eyed Meechie as security returned our guns and walked us out of the house.

“What she give you?” Meechie asked as he placed his gun back in his jeans.

“I don’t know. Let’s get out of here and check it out.” I tucked the paper in my pocket. We walked down the front stairs of Monroe’s old home and to the car.

“Iris a geeker,” I blurted, causing Meechie’s mouth to drop.

“Damn, no wonder he chose Kashus to fill his shoes.” He shook his head in disbelief. My mouth opened to agree with what he’d just said, but I was cut off by the vibration of my phone. Unknown Caller flashed on the screen, and I knew automatically it was my father calling me from his burner phone. He didn’t call me unless he needed something or wanted to tell me how much of a disappointment I was to him. The timing of his call was telling me it had something to do with Monroe. I swiped to answer the call.

“Royale.” His voice barreled into the car speakers.

“Yeah, Pop,” I answered him.

“Return the girl,” he ordered. His voice was calm and menacing, as always. My father thought everyone was supposed to bend to his demands,

which was exactly how he spoke.

“That girl you speak of is my wife. So, you can see why I can’t do that.” My father didn’t scare me. I was no longer the little boy that listened and obeyed. I was my own man.

“A wife that you unlawfully obtained, Royale.”

“I didn’t know stealing a nigga girl was an unlawful crime,” I joked, knowing it was pissing him off.

“It’s a law of the streets. You know the code you turned your back on.”

“I didn’t turn my back on anything, Pop. I’m doing exactly what you raised me to do, be a man. I’m carving my path and standing on my own two feet.” It was a time when my father's disapproval of my choices got to me, but I’d stopped seeking his approval long ago. I accepted that his opinion of me didn’t matter because his values and goals weren’t aligned with mine, and they would never be.

“Standing on your own two feet and hiding behind the cartel support. Something is not adding up.” He laughed.

“Is this why you called?” I was done with this conversation. It was pointless. Monroe wasn’t going anywhere.

“The cartel is not going to support you through no war over a girl!”

“Last I checked, Pop, that wasn’t your decision,” I said before hanging up the phone. I didn’t have anything else to discuss with my father. He was still controlling the cartel, but Meechie was the acting boss. He didn’t need my father’s approval. He took his orders out of respect, not obligation.

“Yo’ wars are my wars, bro.” Meechie turned to face me as he pulled out of the Iris estate. “Is that what he wants?”

“His offer was his heir or go to war.” I unballed the piece of paper that Contessa had handed me. It was a handwritten note that appeared to be written in a hurry. The words caused me to still in my seat. The air was knocked out of my lungs as I processed the words.

They know where she is.

“Shit, the meeting was a decoy. They going for Monroe.” I turned the note for Meechie to read. His head dropped before his jaw clenched.

“How the fuck do they know where to find her?” He was just as stunned as me. That was exactly what I was asking myself. Nobody knew where my safe house was located. My flights to and from the island weren’t reported. Tessa could have told, but she’d alerted me, so that couldn’t be it. Suddenly, it hit me like a ton of bricks.

“It was Pop! Fuck!” My voice thundered. My father knew about the safe house—he’d had it built. He knew all its secrets. I pulled up Monroe’s contact information and dialed her number. Maybe Tessa had alerted her already, and she was safe.

“I’ll have them get the plane ready,” Meechie informed me as he typed on his phone.

“Hey, London.” Monroe picked up the phone.

“They know where you are. You not safe in the house.” I rushed out. I didn’t know how long she had before they had reached her. I cursed myself for not having security watch her. I truly thought she was safe in the house. It was a rookie mistake, and I fucking knew better.

“What?” I could hear her breathing increase.

“You have to go to Aunt Vanessa’s. She’ll be able—”

“There’s a noise at the door,” she interrupted me. Hearing how afraid she was threatened to tear my heart right out of my chest.

“Get to the shelter!” I demanded. I was hoping my father wasn’t expecting Monroe to know about it. It was a long shot, but it was all I had. “Go now! You know the one I showed you in the greenhouse. I’m locking the house down now. When I do that, everyone inside with you will be locked inside.” It was a fail-safe mechanism. Nobody in and nobody out. It would buy time until I could alert the local authorities. If Kashus had someone there, the police should be able to take care of it.

“Aye, if he breaks a bunch of air traffic laws, Jake said he could get us there in an hour and forty minutes,” Meechie said. The tunnel under the house led to the other side of town. It would take Monroe about an hour to make it to the bunker. I would have the local authorities meet her there. It was all beginning to make sense. Meechie and I had walked right into a damn trap. This was why they’d set the meeting up in Bristol City instead of coming to Miami or meeting in a mutual location. They knew it would take me too long to get to her from here. I dropped my head as Monroe moved around the house. I could hear her rapid breathing through the phone.

“Monroe,” I called her name. I needed to make sure she was listening.

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Once you are in the safe shelter, this call will drop. You will have no phone service. Follow the tunnel, it’s about an hour’s walk. It will lead to a

bunker. I will have a Cuban officer there to meet you. He will take you somewhere safe until I get to you."

"Okay, I'm in the greenhouse now," she whispered. "I heard voices at the front door." She was scared, and I couldn't even fake the shit. I was too. I ain't know what her father or Kashus would do to her if she were back in their possession.

"Move fast; the door automatically closes and locks behind you."

The phone fell quiet, and all that could be heard was her heavy breathing. My head was spinning. Meechie was swerving through the streets like a bat out of hell, and my heart was breaking. I had fallen for Monroe a long time ago, but now I could honestly say I loved her. The thought of being without her or not being able to protect her was too much to bear.

"Chocolate."

"Yes?"

"I love you. I love you, and I'm going handle this shit."

"I love y—" The call dropped, and so did a nigga fucking heart.

"If something happens to Monroe, I'm gon' unretire and be the savage I was born to be." I grunted. Meechie sighed.

"She gon' be good; we gon' get there." He assured me.

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

"I love you, too," I whispered, lowering my body into the hole.

"London? London?" I said as I descended the ladder into the dark and narrow tunnel. The phone went silent, and I knew my time to talk to him was over. My heart was pounding in my chest, and my mind was racing with fear and uncertainty. I had so many questions, but no one to ask them to because the call had dropped as soon as the trap door shut just as London had warned.

When my feet touched the ground, I looked around for light. It was no use, though, because I could barely see in front of me. *Think, Monroe.* I felt around in the dark. Suddenly it hit me, and I clicked the flashlight button on my phone. It wasn't much coemption for the underground darkness but provided just enough light to illuminate the path before me. The footsteps moving around upstairs startled me. I hoped like hell they didn't know where to find me. I feared what would happen to me if I was found, and I couldn't shake feeling helpless and alone. I stood there frozen in fear, but then London's orders played in my head. I had to keep going until I reached the shelter.

"You got this!" I told myself as I took off walking in the only direction I could go. My thoughts were going a mile a minute. What would happen if I was found? What if London didn't make it to me? How had my dad and Kashus found me? Hours seemed to pass by before I finally reached the shelter. A sense of relief swept over me as a man wearing a uniform and

badge came into view. The closer I got, the more that relief faded. The officer's lifeless body dropped to the ground and Kashus came into view holding a pistol in my direction.

"Took yo' fat ass long enough. I was starting to think you weren't coming."

"Kashus?" I slowly backed away, but he stepped forward, grabbing my arm.

"Don't fucking think about it. Get your fat ass in here." He threw me on the floor and shut the door behind me. The pain from the impact of hitting the ground shot through me, and I glared up my ex-fiancé.

"Imagine this, your fiancée is supposed to be in Miami getting her body done for a nigga, and you find out that she then ran off with the damn surgeon."

"Kashus, I—" I attempted to stand up and explain myself, but Kashus's hand connected to my jaw causing me to fall. My head dropped, the shock that Kashus had just hit me stung my face.

"Sit yo' ass down! I knew you were fat, but I didn't know you were a ho." His voice thundered. This time, instead of using his bare hands to hit me, he connected the butt of the gun to my face. I could feel the skin on my jaw open and blood pour out from the wound.

"You so fucking stupid, man. You better not of fucked that nigga, Monroe." London's words invaded my thoughts again. This was my chance to take back everything that Kashus and my father had stolen from me. I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cower to him. Raising my head, I clenched my jaw.

"I fucked the shit out of him!" I shot back. Before I could make out what was happening, Kashus had connected the butt of the gun to my face again. Blood immediately leaked down my shirt and a throbbing pain took over. I pressed my hand to my face, attempting to stop the pain.

"Bitch, you married that motherfucker for real?" Kashus grabbed my hand, holding it close to his face. I screamed in pain as he yanked the ring from my finger. It felt as if my hand had detached from my body.

"I look like a motherfucker you can play with, Monroe? You know what happens to disloyal bitches?"

I didn't respond. My only concern was stopping the stabbing pain that was coming from my hand. I slid my hand under my body, hoping the pressure would ease the pain. It was no use because Kashus grabbed me by

my hair and drug me to a pole in the corner of the room. He took my right hand and handcuffed me to the pole. Confusion plagued my mind. I didn't know why he was keeping me here. I thought we would be on our way back to Bristol City by now.

“What are we doing?” I slurred. My words were muffled due to the swelling that was coming on my face.

“Waiting on yo’ lil square ass boyfriend.” He sat down next to me in a chair. “He’s going to come for you, and when he does, I’ll put a fucking bullet in his head for touching what was mine.”

My eyes watered at the mention of London. My worst fear was coming true. When London got here, he was going to be killed. I hung my head in defeat.

“Don’t worry, though, because once we’re married, your father’s business is turned over to me. I’ll put one in your head, too, so you can join him.”

Defeat swept over me, and I lowered my head, allowing the tears to flow. Kashus returned to the other side of the room and took a seat on the bed. I didn’t know how I was getting out of this. At least I knew he didn’t plan to kill me until after we were married. I tried my hardest to keep my eyes on him, but the pain that was echoing through my body took over my concentration. I was fading in and out of consciousness. Each time my eyes opened and closed, I had no clue how much time had passed. I attributed the passing out to the amount of blood that was leaking from my face. I needed to tell him I was losing too much blood. My eyes found Kashus again. He was pushing a white substance up his nose. I couldn’t believe what I was watching. I never pegged him for a drug user.

“You know why I fuck with other bitches, Monroe, because they know how to have fun. You so fucking boring!” He stood and began walking toward me again. I was trembling at the thought of what he was going to do. He bent over to me. I noticed the crazed look in his eyes as he pulled out the same white substance he’d stuffed in his nose.

“No!” I shook my head franticly, shielding my face as best I could. He was going to try to force me to inhale it.

“Stop fucking moving, Monroe.” He grabbed my hair.

“Please no, Kashus, stop!” I sobbed hysterically.

“Shut the fuck up!” Kashus came close to my face, taking my swollen jaw into his hands. “Bitch, were you crying when you let that nigga fuck,

huh?”

“Nah, nigga, I ain’t never seen a tear fall from her pretty ass face.” London’s voice echoed from the doorway as a bullet went through Kashus’s head. His lifeless body fell on top of me.

“Ah!” My scream filled the room.

“I got you, Chocolate. I got you.” London rushed toward me. He kicked Kashus’s dead body off me and fished his pockets, coming up with the key. The moment he uncuffed me, he scooped me up in his arms bridal style. He paid extra attention to my face.

“That bitch nigga hit you?” he questioned. I nodded. My face hurt too bad to form words.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here.” He kissed my wounded face. “I’m so sorry, baby.”

“She aight?” Meechie burst through the other door of the bunker. He kicked Kashus as he stepped over his lifeless body. “I’ll call the cleaners to come handle that. Don’t worry,” he said as he neared me. I could tell he was examining my face.

“She bleeding real bad. She may need stitches. I can clean her up, but I need to get her to the hospital, so I can operate.” London was now holding a towel or something to my face.

“Let’s go. I’ll drive,” Meechie replied. That was the last thing I heard as everything around me faded to black.

“ARE YOU GOING TO TELL HER AS SOON AS SHE WAKES UP?” I COULD HEAR voices speaking around me. I listened in, trying to make out who was talking. I had been going in and out of consciousness for a while, but I didn’t know what was happening. Everything felt like a dream.

“I don’t know. That’s a lot on her.” That was London. He sounded far away but still close enough for me to hear him.

“Regardless of how he raised her, she is gonna want to know. The longer you keep it from her, the harder it’ll be.” That was Aunt Vanessa. What were they talking about? I tried to open my eyes but quickly shut them as pain shot through my head.

“How am I supposed to tell her this shit, Aunt V. A baby? And then her pops.” London’s voice cracked. My eyes fluttered open and then closed again. Had something happened to Tessa and the baby? I tried again to open my eyes. This time, London and Aunt Vanessa came into view. We were in a hospital room. They were standing at the other end of the room, whispering about telling me something.

“Tell me what?” I spoke. My slurred voice and aching face shocked me. That was not how I was expecting to sound. London and Aunt Vanessa rushed from where they stood in the room. Their faces lit up like they hadn’t seen me in a while.

“Why y’all looking at me like that?” I questioned.

“Do you remember anything that happened, Chocolate?” London touched my arm, causing me to look down at the cast on my left hand. Images of Kashus ripping my engagement ring from my finger flooded my memory and everything came rushing back to me all at once. Kashus had repeatedly struck me in the face with his gun. He was attempting to force crack down my nose when London killed him. His lifeless body invaded my memory.

“Kashus… h-he… y-you,” I stuttered, trying to find the words. London gently touched his hand to my face.

“Relax, Chocolate. You have a few stitches in your face. Don’t overdo it.”

I thought about the amount of blood that had leaked from my face. I knew the blows I’d taken had done some significant damage.

“Can I see it?” I whispered. Aunt Vanessa reached into her purse and held up a mirror. My face was severely swollen on one side and a large stitched up wound ran down the right side of my face. I cringed at the sight of myself. I didn’t know if I would ever look the same again. Tears rimmed my eyes. I was happy that London had killed the bastard, but the damage was already done.

“I stitched you up myself.” London touched along the side of the wound. I could tell it pained him to see me like this. “It’s going to heal perfectly. You’ll only have a tiny little scar.” He held up his fingers putting a one-inch space between his thumb and pointer fingers. I nodded. Knowing that London had operated on me himself sent a warm tingly feeling through my body, and it caused me to stare at him.

“I’m going to go let the doctors know the anesthesia wore off,” Aunt Vanessa said as she exited the room, leaving London and me alone. He gazed at me for a second, and I could tell something was bothering him.

“What is it you need to tell me?” I asked again.

London climbed into the bed with me with a somber expression on his face as he cuddled close to me. This was new but I welcomed his body blanketing mine. It was exactly what I needed right now.

“I really don’t know how to say this shit… but an early pregnancy was detected when they took your blood.”

My jaw dropped as far as it could. *A pregnancy?* Was that possible? I was on birth control.

“I can’t be pregnant, I’m on birth control.” I was in shock.

“Was pregnant. The stress of the incident is the likely cause.”

I didn’t know what to say. I had been pregnant, and I’d lost the baby.

“It was yours,” a faint whisper escaped my mouth.

“I know.” He kissed my forehead and held me closer.

“I’m sorry.” I felt bad for losing the baby. I didn’t even know I was pregnant. There were no symptoms or signs.

“Don’t worry, Chocolate. When the time is right, I’ll fill you with a ton of my seeds.” He kissed me and I kissed him back, envisioning a handful of little ones running around.

“The timing wasn’t right when we crossed that threshold. You’ll be mine officially, not just on paper. You’ll have a career and that list of things you’ve never done before will all be checked off.” He kissed me again. “Then you will bear my seeds.”

If I could smile, I would have been cheesing hard as fuck. This man always knew the right things to say and when to say them.

“I have something for you.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. I glared at him confused.

“These are the keys to your apartments. I didn’t know where you wanted to live, so I got you a few places.”

“What?” I must not have heard him correctly. *Did he say he’d brought me an apartment?*

“This goes to the apartment in Jersey.” He held up one of the keys. “This one is the one in California, Miami, and Bristol City of course.” He opened my right hand and placed the keys in them. I stared at him, processing what he’d done.

“You bought me four apartments?”

“Yeah.” He shrugged as if it was nothing.

“I can’t afford four apartments. I don’t have a real job. Just because Kashus is dead doesn’t mean my father won’t keep coming for me.”

“Chocolate, I need to tell you something else.” His demeanor changed, and I immediately knew something was wrong.

“What is it?” Concern filled my body.

“There are a lot of things about your father you don’t know.”

I didn’t respond. I just sat there listening,

“Your father has been battling cancer. He has a rare form of skin cancer. That is why he insisted on you marrying Kashus. He needed an heir.”

All the air drained from body.

“Is he dying? Wait… how do you know this?” I was speaking fast.

“I meet with your father yesterday. He lured us to Bristol City so he could send Kashus here to retrieve you.”

“There’s more.” He paused taking a deep breath. “Tessa called late last night, Roe. The doctors said there’s no more they can do. He’s at the end of life.”

I could hear London talking, but everything seemed to stand still. My father was a lot of things, but he was all I had in this world. He was all I knew. I attempted to sit up.

“With your father unconscious and Kashus gone, you can finally be free. You don’t have to worry about them anymore,” London said.

I turned my teary eyes toward him. London had done what he said and got me out of my arranged marriage, but it was bittersweet. My father was dying.

“Tell me where you want to go, Chocolate. Your new life starts today. You don’t have to worry about rent. The properties are yours. You own them. Any other expenses I’ll take care of them. We can go tomorrow and open you up at bank account. I’ll deposit a hundred thousand in there, but you’re going to be a lot richer when your inheritance comes.”

I should have been happy, but I couldn’t stop thinking about my dad. My whole world seemed to spin out of control.

“Take me to him.” I gasped. “I want to go home. I need to be with my father.” I burst into tears. London squeezed me close. He probably thought I was stupid. My father was the reason I was laying up in the hospital. He knew what Kashus would do to me if he found me and he still sent him…

still that was my father. He stared at me for a moment before bringing me into his chest.

“Okay. We can leave tonight.”

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

A month later

“Monroe!” Tessa called out to me from the inflatable pool we’d set up in the living room for her water birth. When my father had fallen ill and been put on hospice, she changed the plan from hospital birth to at home. Tessa wanted him to be a part of the labor and delivery process since he would already be missing the baby's entire life.

“I’m here! You're doing great.” I rushed to her side. I took the wet rag I held in my hand and patted her on the forehead. She had been at this for several hours now, and I think everyone in the room had grown tired.

“Oh my God!” Tessa screamed as the midwife instructed her to push. I glanced over at my father. He was sitting in a nearby chair. The doctors said he could hear and see us, but he was not responsive.

“I need you, Monroe!” Tessa pleaded. We were all each other had now that my father was dying. I’d spent the last month going back and forth between the apartment London had gifted me and my father’s home. Receiving the news of my father’s failing health had been a lot to take in. Even with everything he’d done, I still wanted to return home to be with him in his final days. Besides, Tessa was in her final month of pregnancy, and she didn’t need to be alone.

“Can I join her?” I asked the midwife.

“Please,” Tessa pleaded. The midwife nodded. I slid off my sandals and joined Tessa in the tub.

“Thank you!” she gasped, grabbing her belly.

“Another contraction is coming!” the midwife informed us. I held Monroe’s legs as she screamed and pushed.

“You're doing great,” I reassured her.

“I see the head!” The midwife screamed. My eyes shot to my father. He was looking right at us. His eyes held my gaze. I had no idea that my father had been using the very drugs he’d been selling. He hid it well just like his illness. It turned out that Kashus had been supplying my father with laced cocaine to weaken his immune system and kill him faster. Without the drugs, he could have had a better quality of life toward the end. He could have lived months or even years with his cancer. The cocaine he’d ingested in front of London that day had dealt him his final cards.

The sound of crying shook me from my thoughts, and I returned my eyes back to Tessa. My little brother had arrived. They took his naked body straight to my father. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I watched the midwife hold my baby brother on my fathers’ lap. He wouldn’t have a father, and a part of me was relieved for him. Maybe he would be better off without having a father like ours. I climbed out of the tub and trotted over to where my father was sitting. Water dripped from my body, but I wanted to capture this moment. My brother would grow up and ask about his dad, and I wanted to at least be able to give him a picture. I grabbed my phone from a nearby table and approached them. The midwife was holding the baby in his lap.

My fathers’ breathing was sporadic. I think it was his way of expressing his emotions. I couldn’t even begin to imagine what he’d been thinking. As I snapped a bunch of pictures of the two of them, my heart filled with sadness and regret for all of the things I had missed out on in my father-daughter relationship.

Our entire relationship had been focused on raising me to be someone’s wife a… bargaining chip. There were no loving moments. No father-daughter dances. No cuddles and movie nights. I glared at him, and our eyes locked. The more we stared at each other the heavier his breathing became.

“I’m going to make sure he is nothing like you.” I stared at him. Strangely, I felt a sense of closure and peace wash over me. Despite the pain he had caused me, I knew I had done the right thing by returning home to care for him in his final days. I removed the baby from his lap and returned to Contessa.

“He’s so precious.” I lowered the baby onto her chest. Her eyes immediately filled with tears. “What’s his name?”

“Tyler. It’s perfect.” She whimpered as she held him in her arms. He was perfect, and I as I stared at him, I couldn’t help but think about London and the baby I had lost.

“Oh my God! He’s gone!” the midwife yelled. My head whipped around, and my eyes shot to my father. His eyes were closed, and his chest wasn’t weaving in and out anymore. He was no longer with us. I stood there in shock. I wasn’t expecting this to happen right now. Not today.

“Jacob!” Tessa cried. She attempted to stand up but quickly cried out in pain.

“Tessa, sit. You can’t,” I pleaded with her.

“This can’t be happening, not today.” She shook her head. I bent over and wrapped her and the baby in my arms. No words came out. Just tears. My father was gone.

“Watch your step.” I alerted Tessa as we stepped into my high-rise apartment. We’d spent most of the day taking care of the baby and saying our final goodbyes to my father. My heart broke for Tessa. She gave birth and lost her husband on the same day. I couldn’t leave her there in that house alone with a newborn and grieving so I offered for them to come here. The apartment London had purchased for me had two bedrooms. There was plenty of space for Tessa and the baby, Tyler, to stay as long as they needed.

“Thank you for allowing us to stay here.” Tessa walked over to the couch and laid baby Tyler down.

“We are family, Tessa. We have to stick together.” I moved around my home, turning on the lights.

“I’ll get the room set up for you and the baby. You rest!” I yelled at her as I walked into my guest room. I had only begun making the bed when the tears started pouring from my eyes. I had just lost my father. I plopped down on the bed, allowing my emotions to take center stage. I’d been holding it in all day attempting to be strong for Tessa. Maybe I couldn’t hold it anymore. My phone vibrated. It was Alyza. We had been talking

every day since I'd returned to Bristol City. I thought about rejecting her call, but she'd just call back. Swiping her name, I answered it.

"Why are you crying?" Her voice came through the phone. I tried to muffle my sobs, but I guess I hadn't done a good job.

"He's gone, Lyza. He's gone!" I sobbed.

"Oh, Monroe. I'm sorry. Mom and I are going to be on the first plane there." I nodded as if she could see me. "How are you holding up? Wait, that's a stupid question."

"I'm doing okay. Tessa had the baby today, too."

"Oh my, how is she? Where is she? Where is the baby?" Alyza questioned.

"She's here. I was holding it together and then it just hit me." It felt good to vent to someone. I didn't realize how much I needed that.

"Have you called London?"

London. My heart ached at the mention of his name. I hadn't seen him since he dropped me off here after my first visit to see my father. He'd left and hadn't reached out to me at all. He was serious about giving me my space, but I didn't need space. I needed him. I missed him. He still had been planning weekly dates for me, but when I would call to thank him, he wouldn't answer.

"London doesn't answer the phone for me, remember?" I replied somberly.

"Maybe shoot him a text. He wouldn't leave you alone at a time like this."

I wasn't in the mood to discuss London. I didn't believe that my heart could take it.

"He left me this far. I… um… I need to get this guest room ready for Tessa and the baby. I'll see you later."

"Okay, I'll call you before our flight leaves." Alyza rushed. "Call me or Ma if you need anything."

"Okay." I hung up the phone. The tears picked up again and the notification dinged on my phone.

Reminder: Meeting with Bristol City Funeral Home at 9am.

More tears came down my eyes at the realization that I had to plan my father's funeral.

OceanofPDF.com

London

"You sure about going in there?" Meechie questioned me as soon as we pulled up to Monroe's dad's funeral.

"Yeah, I'm here to support Monroe. I'm not going to let her face this alone."

"I'm just making sure, nigga. Didn't you go ghost on her?" Meechie climbed out of the car.

He had a good point. Monroe and I hadn't talked in weeks. I was allowing her space. I couldn't lie, I was a little irritated that I'd gone through all of that to get her a new life and she chose to go right back to her father. I didn't understand it, but it wasn't my place to understand. That was why I removed myself. Leaving her to live her own life was always the plan. Our marriage was on paper only. When Alyza called and told me that her father had finally passed away, I knew I had to be here for her. Monroe was going to need me. Even after everything she'd endured, Monroe still loved her father. I got it. It just took Aunt Vanessa cursing me out for me to finally come to my senses.

"I gave her space," I replied as we walked into the building.

"Did she need space, though?" Meechie shot back.

I stopped and stared at him. Meechie had been making a whole lot of sense lately. That must have been the effect of Samara. The verdict was still out on how I felt about them dating but if she was bringing this out of him, I fucked with it.

“Come on, nigga. Let’s go support sis.” He walked into the funeral home.

“Oh, so she sis now?”

“Been sis, and you better stop trying to force her to live life without you before you regret it, nigga.” I followed closely behind him. I was just trying to give her some space. Her moving on was never a fucking option. The moment I stepped into the nearly empty funeral home, I was drawn to her. My feet carried me to her before my eyes even spotted her. She was sitting in the back alone with tears streaming down her face. Even in her grief, she was still the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen. I moved to her, no questions asked.

“Is this seat taken?” I whispered. I didn’t know how she was going to react to me being here. I had ghosted her. She’d called, and I would watch it ring, knowing if I answered I would break my promise to her and demand her in my space. The moment she looked up and saw me and Meechie, her face lit up, and she nodded her head.

I sat down next to her. Meechie hugged her, offering his condolences before finding a seat on another aisle. I wrapped my arms around her, offering her my shoulder to cry on. She leaned into me naturally. No words were said because none were needed. We stayed like that for the rest of the service. At the final visitation, I held her up as she cried over her father’s body. Watching her break down made me feel like shit. I’d ghosted her during what was probably the most difficult time of her life—watching the man that raised her die. I wasn’t ever leaving her alone again. I hoped she knew that.

“Thank you for coming, London,” she whispered as she met me in the stairs of the funeral home. I’d been waiting there patiently, allowing her to mingle and greet guests. I’d meant what I said, and I wasn’t going anywhere.

“You could have called me,” I replied.

“Oh, you would have answered?” she countered. I deserved that.

“I was stupid, aight? Pushing you away when all you ever wanted was to be close.” I closed the distance between us. “We can discuss all of that later. Right now, all I want to do is take care of you—help you through this. Can I do that, Chocolate?”

Her eyes bounced around for a moment.

“Yes, but I can’t leave Tessa right now.” Her eyes darted to a very distraught Tessa. I signaled for Alyza and Aunt Vanessa to approach her. They would take Tessa and the baby to a nice hotel and stay with her for the night.

“She’s in good hands.” I pointed in her direction. Monroe’s eyes followed my finger. “They are going to take her to a hotel and make sure her and the baby good. Y’all are both grieving differently so y’all need different support.” Monroe stared up at me for a little while before nodding.

“Let’s get out of here.” I grabbed her hand and led her to my car.

“Where are we going?” she questioned.

“Your place tonight, but we going home in the morning!”

“Home?

“Yeah, home!” I opened the car door for her to get inside. “I decided that any healing or freedom you need, I want to be right there while you get it.”

Monroe folded her arms across her body.

“Who said that’s what I wanted?” She was still mad, I got it, but just this one time I wasn’t giving her a choice.

“Who said you had a choice this time?” I closed the door, walked around, and got inside. I couldn’t change the past, but I was determined to be there for her in the present. Monroe was mine, fuck her freedom—she’d had enough.

“How’s the water, Chocolate?” I entered the bathroom to check on Monroe. Last night was rough. She’d spent most of the night crying. As I approached, she attempted to wipe the tears she’d been crying with the back of her hand, but it was too late. I’d seen her. Walking over to her, I didn’t say anything. This was what I was here for… to provide her comfort. I picked up the sponge and bathed her perfect body. She was beautiful even in her most vulnerable state. I rolled a sponge over her body, caressing her as tears stained her face.

“How are you feeling?” I sat on the edge of the tub.

“Numb, like I don’t want to feel.”

My heart broke for her. Her grief would take tine. She wouldn't heal in a day.

"It takes time, Chocolate. You have to relearn who you are. This version of you doesn't have a father," I continued, washing her up.

"I want to feel anything but this. Heal me," she requested sweetly as my hands swiped over her erect nipples. She didn't have to ask me again. I pulled her up out of the tub. I was all the healing she would ever need.

"Heal me, London." I touched my lips to hers as I carried her out of the bathroom and into her bedroom.

"Ohhh!" she moaned into my mouth as I positioned myself at her center.

"Tell me what you've learned about yourself." I entered her, and everything was right with my spirit. My peace had returned.

"I'm perfect!" She moaned.

"What else?" I stroked into her, reintroducing my dick to her insides.

"I'm capable of overcoming this." I pumped harder inside her. "I'm open to healing!" She tossed her head back in bliss. Hearing her affirm herself had me digging in her insides harder and deeper than ever before. I loved every word she spoke. "Ohhh! It feels so good!" She wrapped her arms around my neck and pulled me in closer. I pumped into her with precision, savoring every minute of our bodies connecting. "Why… does… it feel… so good?" She panted. Her insides tightened around my dick.

"Because it's my job. I'm yo' bodyguard, remember?"

"Unh huh!"

"You're mine!" I stroked into her. Tears rolled down her cheeks. I leaned into her, kissing away every tear on her face.

"What are you saying, London?" Her voice was dripping with pleasure.

"I'm saying you my wife and I'm your husband! Not just on paper." I moaned as I felt her juices pour onto me. "That's cool with you, baby?"

"Yes!" Her legs quaked around my body as I delivered one final stroke before I emptied my seeds inside her.

"I love you, Monroe London."

"I love you more, Dr. London!"

OceanofPDF.com

Monroe

Five Years Later

"Congratulations!"

Everyone screamed as I cut the ribbon that was strung in front of my bookstore. I looked out into the crowd, smiling at everyone who had gathered to celebrate with me. About three years ago, I'd expressed to London that I wanted to own a bookstore. Last year for Christmas he'd gifted me this building. That was the way he did things. Anything I wanted or needed, he never hesitated to give me. The last five years had been interesting. London had moved me to Miami, we'd brought a house together, and once a week, we checked off something on my never before list. I was now a gum chewing, big truck driver because my husband had taught me how to drive.

"It's hot out here, sis. Open the door!" Meechie called from the crowd, where he and Samara were standing hand in hand. They'd made their relationship public a few years ago and were planning to get married soon. He had truly become my brother and Samara, once I'd officially met her, had become my sister. I laughed as I swung open the doors to the bookstore. A rush of excitement and anticipation filled me. This was mine. A dream I'd had that London had made happen. Every day with this man was amazing. London grabbed my hand as our family and friends walked into the store. I was stoked as I greeted Tessa and Tyler.

"Hey, Monroe," Tyler greeted. He was newly five years old and the spitting image of our father. I took him into a hug and kissed his forehead.

“Do you have children’s book in here?” he asked.

“Sure do.”

“Do I get a discount? Since I’m your brother and all.”

Tessa and I shared a laugh.

“I do have a special brothers discount,” I replied.

“Bet.” He ran off. “Aye, Mr. Meechie, we get a brother's discount!” he shouted.

Again, Tessa and I shared a laugh.

“You look gorgeous.” She pulled me into a hug.

“Same.” I kissed her cheek.

“I’m so proud of you!” she replied.

“And me you!”

Tessa had taken over my fathers' organization and had become the first female mob boss. She’d been successful in converting the business over to mostly legal streams of income. I was proud that she was breaking tradition and leaving Tyler something he could be proud of.

“Can I borrow my wife for a minute?” London interrupted.

“Sure.” Tessa walked off, and I watched as Polo approached her. He was always shooting his shot at Contessa any time we were all together, and each time Contessa had turned him down.

“That boy ain’t gon’ ever learn.” I shook my head as London turned me around to face him.”

“Yes, husband.” I swooned in his arms.

“The store is beautiful. I’m so proud of you.” He kissed me on the lips.

“I have a surprise for you.” He twirled me around.

“I have a surprise for you!” I shot back, giggling.

“For me? On your grand opening?” He sounded puzzled.

I handed him the white box I had been carrying around in my boobs all day.

“You pregnant?” he blurted, causing me to laugh.

“No; just open it,” I playfully whined. He pulled the lid off revealing a small white tube. He looked up at me then back down at the box.

“Your birth control?” He was shocked. We had discussed kids plenty of times, but London was serious about me accomplishing my dreams before becoming a mom so we waited.

“My storefront is open. I’m ready to start trying for children.” London didn’t say anything as he picked me up and wrapped me into a hug. Tears

streamed down my face.

“What was your surprise?” I questioned.

“I just bought you a new car.” He shrugged holding up a set of car keys.

“Oh my God! Where is it!” I screamed. London pulled me in closer. He placed a soft kiss on my lips before shoving his tongue down my throat. Our tongues intertwined like our family and friends weren’t a few feet away.

“The car can wait, Chocolate. Let's go start this family!” He carried me off to the back of the store. Every day since walking in that doctor’s office five years ago had felt like a dream come true. I was finally being loved and protected the way a black woman should, and I was looking forward to starting a new chapter in my life with my bodyguard.

The End!

OceanofPDF.com

Afterword

Hey, Flowers,

I hope you enjoyed Monroe and Dr. London's journey to love. This book holds a special place in my heart and was very therapeutic to write. During the making of this book I injured my foot. I spent three months on crutches. I needed a bodyguard, so I created one. As my inaugural author year continues, I just want to say thank you to everyone who has been going on the ride. Each book comes with a new challenge, and I truly put my blood, sweat, and tears into these pages. I hope you enjoyed reading it. As usual, if you've made it this far, you are officially a part of the Blossom gang. If you enjoyed this book, do me a favor and please leave me a five-star review. To keep up with me and look out for my future work:

Join my discussion group on Facebook by searching Blossom's Bunch. You can also click the link below to join my Flower Power Gang!

https://www.facebook.com/groups/601234962061195/?ref=share_group_link

And follow me on everything. I'd love to interact with you.

Follow me on social media!
IG: @Author_Blossom
FB: Author A Blossom
Twitter: AuthorBlossom

Oh, and if you haven’t already, check out my other titles!

- Series
- Between a Soul Tie (Book 1)
- Playing with Soul Ties (Book 2)
- Novellas
- Sex and Rescue
- F**king or Loving: An Erotic Thriller
- Her Heart on Ice (BLP Fairytales book 8)

Love,
A. Blossom

OceanofPDF.com

BLP

Visit bit.ly/readBLP to join our mailing list for sneak peeks and release day links!

Let's connect on social media!
Facebook - B. Love Publications
Twitter - @blovepub
Instagram - @blovepublications

We hate errors, but we are human! If the B. Love team leaves any grammatical errors behind, do us a kindness and send them to us directly in an email to blovepublications@gmail.com
with ERRORS as the subject line.

As always, if you enjoyed this book, please leave a review on Amazon/Goodreads, recommend it on social media and/or to a friend, and mark it as READ on your Goodreads profile.

By the Book with B Podcast: bit.ly/bythebookwithb

OceanofPDF.com